



LEGEND OF THE SUPREME SOLDIER

BOOK 05

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Legend of the Supreme Soldier

(师士传说)

by

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(方想)

Synopsis

Ye Chong was a denizen of Trash Planet-12. On one fateful day, he discovered a treasure that would forever alter his destiny from a pile of junk – Mu Shang, an unknown machine with artificial intelligence and a lost memory. Together, they venture into the vast galaxy as the isolated “caveman” that was Ye Chong began absorbing all sorts of knowledge and meeting people from all walks of life. He gradually discovers more and more about his own mysterious past as well as his partner’s. Read to find out more!

Acknowledgement

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Chapter 401: The Mysterious Ridge of May's Night

"Arbeni, anything particular on this fellow?" asked the man behind his dark mask, as he slightly tilted his head to the other 5 members in his team. The man had a bulky curve, with over-sized muscles all over his arms and legs that they seemed capable of shaking the earth. His eyes were bloodshot, looking violently destructive.

"Can't feel anything," said Arbeni behind his cloak, his expression was almost imperceivable, though his eyes lustered with desire occasionally.

"Liu Sheng?" Turned the masked man to another person, "See anything?" he whispered.

Liu Sheng yawned and tried lifting his drowsy eyelids, "Nope." His lethargic voice trailed off as he went seemingly asleep.

"Dong Mo, Sisko, notice anything?" The masked man seemed very inquisitive at this.

"N...a...h...h...h...," said Dong Mo. Was Dong Mo actually there? The masked man was talking to his stack of afterimages as if. Ye Chong would have probably noticed this anomaly assuming he was right there. The body of this Dong Mo guy was apparently ever-vibrating at a very high frequency, that his voice sounded blurry as his look.

"Tackan, would you stop?" Sisko sounded irritated. The voice was menacing like a condensed fury. Sisko was considerably athletic at his appearance similar to a small hill on the ground, while Tackan was looking merely like the herd down the hill. Sisko's stare was much more fearsome than anybody else.

Tackan showed negligence towards Sisko's annoyance as he turned to the last person of his team, "Kurdi, how about you?"

Kurdi was the only non-combat member among the six of them. He shrugged, "To be honest, I am still out of the situation. So why the panic, could any of you tell me?" his goatee shook as he spoke.

And it was a moment of awkward silence after that.

It took several minutes for the mood to set, "Well, he's strong!" said Tackan sluggishly.

That was when the eyes of Arbeni celestially shone within his cloak. The statement seemed to have captured their attention, even Liu Sheng's ever-drowsy eyes suddenly went forcibly open and Dong Mo had... accelerated, his silhouette grew fuzzier. Sisko gave a bright smile, with veins pumped hard once on his forehead.

"Very strong?" Kurdi was startled by the mutation of his teammates.

Well his inquiry went unanswered however.

It had been quite some time since Ye Chong felt such unsettling feeling inside him, as he had probably encountered the strongest group in his entire life. The entire team, other than the alchemist, consisted of fighters who very likely had surpassed standard of the Jie experts.

5 Jie experts on the ride. What a trip.

What are they doing here though?

That was the first doubt emerged and lingered in Ye Chong's thoughts.

They are very dangerous.

The instinct had struck the red alert.

Ye Chong was considering quitting the party since their entities were enough threatening to his safety even without having an actual conflict. Ye Chong could just feel death from the gazes of their eyes.

Ye Chong was not sure the performance of an average fighter on

Planet Guang Hua but he was fairly certain that these were the top fighters on the planet. The alchemist on the other hand, Ye Chong could not tell just yet, but judging from the fact that this alchemist could remain in their party, he must be something.

Well, if Ye Luo is here, he probably would be hopping around in excitement...

Thought Ye Chong.

It was some nonsense in his head but it helped loosening his nerves.

He had been plotting several escape plans in his mind. These fighters might not impose threats to him if he were to run away. He was pretty confident in his agility after all.

Ye Chong was in a party of 7 and he was treated with good hospitality. Under the constant interaction initiated by Caravan Leader Yu, both the group of mysterious men and the caravan leader grew closer. This was not a good sign to Ye Chong, he became more cautious upon seeing how the group was capable of inhibiting their brewing violence, including the giant in their group. He simply did not imagine how the bulky man could put up such a friendly smile whenever the leader approached him. That was a masterly control.

Ye Chong eventually looked like the more antisocial member in the party.

During the journey, the leader started sharing some of the folktales and local cultures he knew. It was rather interesting to be frank.

"I assume all of you have not been there before eh?" asked Leader Yu.

"Mhm, right, our visit this time is to behold the wonder of the city of alchemy," said the goatee guy with an impressed look.

"Hah! Certainly Line Shaft City does not have this name for no

reason. Once you've been there you will see how almost everything is of the alchemy, by the alchemy, for the alchemy. I must say, brother, you shall prosper there with your talent! Lots of works to do!" Another cheap compliment from Leader Yu, "Yes, say if you shouted for an alchemist, 4 out of 5 men would be turning back on you. Imagine that strange sight! I too stumbled upon the happening on my first visit. There were simply too many alchemists there. You could see the bum-looking elders sitting by the street, whom you could employ with measly cost for a good whole day. Don't judge them by their apparel though, they are still the top alchemists, when they are outside the city of course. Any top alchemist would only be part of the folks once they stepped into the city."

The leader carried on sharing his tales, while Kurdi flashed his smile from time to time, and gave no comments. The rest of the group was slightly interested in the talk, but Ye Chong was that number one audience to the storytelling.

He did not know much about the city but he would not doubt every statement illustrated by the leader. The city surely had standards since it was the place where Lunatic Guan was trained. She was an insane genius after all, and a place where an insane genius could be trained must be insanely brilliant.

"Every month the market would be a marvel. You could see all sorts of strange, rare materials over the street. As long as you have fortunes, or maybe some connections, there's nothing you can't buy. The marketplace of Line Shaft City is known to have the largest collection of raw materials. We even have our own branch there and not just any merchant could open a store there as they wish. Only the big businessmen would be able to set up their own spot in the market, and only the real deal of alchemy ingredient could stay. Like seriously, no one would be interested on the normal stuffs," somehow the leader sounded proud as he spoke. Then he realized something, "Oh my atrocious memory, I forgot to

ask you brother," he looked at Ye Chong and said, "To which part of the city are you heading?"

And Ye Chong suddenly got spotlighted.

"Ridge of May's Night!" Ye Chong remembered his destination well.

The name turned out to be a mood-changer as everyone else's expression changed dramatically, especially Caravan Leader Yu and Kurdi, even the 5 potential Jie experts jerked on their steps almost simultaneously.

Ye Chong saw every detail of the scene, as confused he became. What kind of place is the Ridge of May's Night?

The gazes at Ye Chong turned peculiar, that felt unexplainably uncomfortable.

The leader's face was drained as his muscles seemed tightened. The only thought remained in his head was all the horrified cries demanding him to distance himself away from this very strange young man. Cold sweats had completely wetted his back and Kurdi was not looking good either.

Somehow there was envy, some hostility and bewilderment in his eyes.

"So... how do you get to the ridge?" asked Ye Chong.

The leader was trying to say something but his dehydrated throat held him. He tried spitting something but he just panicked.

He is actually a person associated with the ridge? He is one figure that I should never mess with! I thought I only managed to grab a chance to know someone from the city, but no! I've hit the jackpot! And it's the worst jackpot ever! It's somebody from the ridge! The ridge! Thought the leader.

If he knew that Ye Chong was someone of the ridge, he would have summoned a few men to carry Ye Chong on an altar or

something. He seriously wondered what bad luck had gotten him into this. The leader could not help but to wail in his mind.

All because of that old man! Why, of all persons, he sent this boy? Curses!

The leader urged himself to say something, yes, the boy of the ridge was speaking, he got to reply, or how ill-manner he would look? He could not mess this up!

Ye Chong once thought the leader had seizures because of the visibly tightened muscles, till he saw the streaming sets over his body.

He said nothing and just stared on.

The leader's sweating intensified!

It took 3 minutes for the leader to say a word, "I don't know!" He screamed, "I know nothing at all!" Caravan Leader Yu thought joyfully that he finally was able to unmute himself, but the first few words he uttered did not seem all that well.

Ye Chong assumed that was a dead-end to his enquiry, so he just turned away and pondered with his eyes closed.

That was a relief to the leader. For once he thought he would be a goner since Ye Chong had not even made a gesture for the past few minutes. At least Ye Chong had ended the conversation himself.

Judging from the leader's reaction, it did not seem to be a good omen. The 5 adepts too reacted towards the place with fear.

But what kind of place is the ridge? Ye Chong got particularly curious.

Chapter 402: Deja Vu

It was Feng Su's first visit to Line Shaft City. If it was not because of how she had to pass by Planet Guang Hua on her way to Dankwood, she probably might never have the chance to visit the city renowned with alchemy marvels. Guang Hua was a known planet within the Xi Feng tribe. Unlike the other aristocrats, the Xi Feng tribe was originated in free space zone, so it was natural for a member of the Xi Feng tribe like Feng Su to recognize the status of this planet.

Speaking of alchemist, the best training ground for alchemist should be He Yue galaxy, particularly the aristocrats of the galaxy. The aristocrats not only were able to preserve the traditional system of alchemy but also happened to be well connected to the other system from the 5 major galaxies. Judging from this, their combined system seemed to have a better odds of making a breakthrough.

In reality however, none of the aristocrats was able to harness the potential of their galaxy. None of the families was able to be the representative of He Yue galaxy. Thus, He Yue galaxy eventually was not able to surpass the historical branches on Planet Guang Hua, despite all the superior conditions it could offer.

There was one incident that every Xi Feng tribe members would remember. On one year, the Xi Feng tribe relied on the Abductor to expand their forces in free space zone. The Abductor had brought large batch of children to the tribe, precisely all talented children, whom were all sent to the Sanctuary, according to what Feng Su knew.

Nevertheless, there was a plot twist on their side soon, as somehow the enormous Abductor organization on Planet Guang Hua disappeared in one night. They did not manage to reveal the culprit. They did hear the motive was to find a child however. That

would be a good clue but the batch of children that year was simply too huge to trace. Moreover these children were distributed rapidly to all parts of the tribe. The case hit the dead-end and nothing new discovered d ever since.

All forces of Xi Feng tribe withdrew themselves promptly from Planet Guang Hua. They had a massive evacuation. The Abductor never managed to escape however. The foe seemed to be rather cruel by nature that none of the abductors left the planet alive. The Abductor thought the organization was well-camouflaged as several alliances had been made with known communities, unfortunately those friendly alliances offered nothing than a blind-eye towards the incident.

Because of that, the tribe had drastically weakened in the free space zone. Other than Xi Feng tribe, the two other aristocrats somehow took the same action, as they also withdrew their forces on Guang Hua.

Planet Guang Hua then became a forbidden place to the tribe.

Luckily Feng Su had the one-and-only opportunity to have a visit. The lively street was a relaxing sight to her, probably because of the fresh green nursery gardens around. The scent of flowers wafted through the air, that reached Feng Su's nose behind her purplish veil. She might have hidden her captivating face carefully, but her curves were still something that grabbed sufficient attention. Well she had gotten used to those sights, so she could not care less.

The tough trainings she had undergone recently did not leave a mark on her enchanting physique. She could not help but to smile upon looking at the crowd around her, as she reminisced those days when she was an undercover at the show business. But those days were already history. She had gotten worn out by the constant training and battles. It was great to be able to experience the tranquility again.

"Hah! We are there guys! Line Shaft City!" a deep voice rang thunderously behind her.

Feng Su frowned, feeling her mood spoiled.

She made a fancy turn to have a careful look at the inconsiderate pedestrian. And she realized, it was not a person but a group.

Her eyes shone in the brightest fear, wondering where these experts came from.

Yup, you guessed it. Feng Su had encountered Ye Chong's party who had just arrived at the city.

Feng Su gave a quick glance at the members, her heart rumbled with intense peculiarity as she lowered her head, trying to hide her astonishment.

5 experts. There were 5 of them, and they were Jie experts.

Feng Su had obtained her title as a Jie expert not too long ago. She also rode a Phoenix Lord graded mech by then. Her extrasensory was enhanced by her training so she could already sense the potency of these men at one glance.

And she thought that would be her biggest surprise, but the young man next to the 5 Jie experts was far greater shocker. There was something imperceivable of him. He might look like an ordinary man by sight, but Feng Su could notice how the 5 Jie experts maintained a visible distance with him.

It can't be. Could this young man be far stronger than the 5 Jie experts? That was a preposterous hypothesis that stirred fear in Feng Su. These 5 would have the greatest strength for they were the Jie experts, yet they feared this boy, assuming he was stronger, then what he would be?

The strangest part was, Feng Su actually sensed some familiarity on this boy. His face gave her a deja vu. She seemed to have seen him before, but she was pretty sure that she had not.

But why, why the deja vu?

Ye Chong recognized Feng Su at first sight. Her exceptional style and charm were already imprinted in his mind. Certainly, it was not because of his puberty. Firstly, Feng Su gave him a painful lesson during the battle. Secondly, Shang once got so obsessed of this beauty that he had to recite her highness on a daily basis. Ye Chong was somehow drilled with the term "curves" upon association with Feng Su.

Ye Chong did not expect to encounter Feng Su however.

Ye Chong's brief awe got perceived by Feng Su, which affirmed to her intuitive speculation that she had met this man before.

Tackan and his mates seemed to have reacted towards Feng Su. They were warriors after all. The countless fights they experienced had already given them the sensibility, that they could tell Feng Su was a Jie expert at first sight.

Their gazes, imbued with their competitiveness, were fired upon Feng Su.

Ye Chong could feel the pressure just by the side. Feng Su tried her best to control her natural competitiveness from going wild. She almost felt like picking a fight but she should not.

The reason was clear. If it was a one-on-one, she probably could win. But a group fight? That would be far-fetched. Assuming they fought, she doubted she could even last till the moment she fully deployed her mech, especially when that unknown boy was right there.

Feng Su's schemata ran wild, figuring a way to eject herself from the scene. She had never visited free space zone before, but she was informed that this place could be a place of the untamed who thirsted battles from time to time. A conflict could be happening soon.

And that was when Sisko made a whistle. A very ear-piercing

whistle, that the passersby covered their ears and avoided him.

"As expected of Line Shaft City, I never expected that I would encounter a female Jie expert, a gorgeous beauty too. Such surprise, ha, ha, ha," Sisko's facial muscles quivered awkwardly, it looked exceptionally scary with his body size.

Meanwhile, few pedestrians were giving off dismissive stares. It was nothing strange as this was a place of alchemy after all, that martial arts practitioners - the presumed uneducated barbarians - should not be visiting. And Sisko could potentially be the most barbaric barbarian ever, judging by his look.

The size of his arm was almost the size of one's thigh. The muscles were solid metal that flick made by his fingers would create an echo.

"You are such sweet person," said Feng Su, in her battle stance, "I am no Jie expert, I am just an ordinary girl you see..." Her angelic voice rang, which seduced the fellow pedestrians successfully. Ye Chong was pretty impressed of her improved voice of seduction.

"Hahaha, keep your little trick, lassie," smiled Sisko, with his lump of veins resting on his forehead like a serpent.

"Liu Sheng, do the talking for me," turned Sisko, as he shouted at the sleepy head behind. "Okay," replied Liu Sheng lethargically as he took a step forward, with a metamorphosis occurring on his face that he became pumped and lively out of sudden.

"It's an honor!" he said. "That we are able to speak with such a beautiful Jie expert. Allow me to introduce myself. I am Liu Sheng, and these are my mates, Sisko, Dong Mo, Arbeni, Tackan and Kurdi," Liu Sheng's tone was calm but somehow an intensity could be felt.

Gasps were heard from the pedestrians. Clearly they recognized those names.

"What about him?" whispered Feng Su, as her fair finger pointed

at Ye Chong.

Chapter 403: Guan Qingheng

"Uh...", Liu Sheng once looked all pumped and ever-ready but now he somehow had lost all his will as he dropped his head.

"Oh...", a soft sigh could be heard from him, the lowered head was a countermeasure to his embarrassment of being never the center of attention in the eyes of this fair lady. Owing the fact that Liu Sheng was pretty handsome naturally, the gesture worked flawlessly as he could perceive the quick squeak from the females around.

Sadly, there were not many girls around here. Thought Liu Sheng. If he was doing this at other cities, he probably already had a fans' club performing a massive passing-out when he did that.

Feng Su's stress had vanished immediately. She was much relieved upon seeing how effective her question was.

Ye Chong had become the focus again.

Who is he?

Whispers rustled among the pedestrians while Liu Sheng's expression remained uneasy. Ye Chong had already become their main target at first sight, especially when he exerted a far stronger danger than this female Jie expert with a fading charm, thus the awkward silence.

An unpredictable threat would always impose the greatest danger.

Ye Chong stayed as an unknown to the group, as it had been revealed that he was associated with the May's Night Ridge the moment they attempted to interview him. That was the red flag to hold the interview session, as they pulled themselves away from this boy.

Nobody would want to have anything to do with the May's Night Ridge, not even those Jie experts like Tackan's group. They would

want to avoid chances of conflict as much as possible, since those of the ridge too possessed highly-refined skills for martial arts.

"Guan Zhufeng. Call me that," stated Ye Chong flatly.

It was ... a foreign name. The 6 of them exchanged glances promptly to verify their impression.

They felt the name was foreign, so was Feng Su. The pedestrians were in major bewilderment however, wondering what this ordinary-looking boy had done on the top fighters of Guang Hua.

Tackan and his mates were well-known among residents of Guang Hua, but Guan Zhufeng? Nobody had heard of such name before. They might be in the city of alchemy, but the citizens were pretty much informed of martial arts practitioners like Tackan's group.

All 6 of them were the top fighters of Congregation. The 5 combat members were the Jie experts who were esteemed for being the facade of martial arts field on Guang Hua when alchemy was the main trend. That was justifiable by their involvement in the Congregation every year. They were the only actual members among the 10 selected practitioners, while the rest of the participants were merely fillers.

Kurdi was the most known figure among all six of them however. The reason was simple, he was an alchemist. For someone who was able to join the Congregation, Kurdi had all the rights to receive respects and admiration from people. He was still young too, with lots of potential there.

One could imagine the group sparkling in their population while being avoidant of this ordinary boy, that was just weird.

"Pal, wanna join the Congregation with us?" said Arbeni out of the blue, as the other members fired passionate gazes at Ye Chong. They had been in a search of martial arts experts on Guang Hua, they really hoped to have more companions on their way there.

The group had spent the past few years putting up facade for Guang Hua's martial arts, they certainly would want new blood.

The 5 combat members would fight with each other as practice to look for that breakthrough on their way searching for new member. On one congregation they encountered Kurdi the alchemist who had joined them promptly. Kurdi joined because he hoped to have subjects to test on his new reagents.

They thought their journey would be fruitless, but they literally encountered 2 Jie experts this time. How could they stay calm on this? Ye Chong was a helpless case however, thanks to his unpredictable standards and his relationship with the ridge. They would want to talk it out, instead of using brutal force. But Feng Su? Well, that was one bird which could be captured with bare hands.

There was already a crowd around them.

It would be an honor for someone to represent the planet and join the Congregation. People looked envious upon Ye Chong, nobody would say no to that invitation.

"Sorry, not interested," the cold line fell upon heating atmosphere.

The group was confused, wondering if their ears had gone wrong.

"Pal, aren't you going to consider it at least?" Arbeni's voice sounded a little irritated.

They might be afraid of the one from May Night's Ridge but the pride they accumulated over the last few congregations had gotten into them. It was an insult from this boy that challenged their pride after all.

The pedestrians were not foolish and could recognize the brewing storm as they backed off right away. A massacre could happen any second soon when it involved Jie experts.

Both Feng Su and Ye Chong were surrounded by the 5 of them. Kurdi had already removed himself from the scene, he was just a feeble alchemist after all.

"How about this pretty? Fancy our invitation?" asked Liu Sheng firmly.

Feng Su's expression remained still, as one perfect line had popped in her head, "I was very much in high admiration towards Mr. Guan. As long as he said yes, I am all fine." That was truly a perfect bounce to the question.

Ye Chong was feeling uncomfortable from the constant stares of the 5. He remained calm however, as his eyes were indifferent.

He tried holding his adrenaline, "I have something to do at the ridge."

It was then a silence.

Pure, dead silence. Every pedestrian literally dropped their tongue upon hearing that unbelievable line.

"So he is from the ridge?"

"The May Night's Ridge..."

"No wonder he refused to join the Congregation..."

"And no wonder he looked all calm even when he was surrounded by 5 congregation representatives..."

Everything made sense with that key phrase now.

May Night's Ridge.

... (Meanwhile at the other side of the street)...

Guan Qingheng was the second leader of the purchasing team this time. That was not the first time he had taken this mission. He looked unexcited merely because of how this job was always a pure boredom. Generally, any position that was regarded the second, the vice, as the supportive role to the first would be an idle

position, since only the first, the alpha, the supported held the more authority.

What could he do anyway? The Guan family had fallen horrendously all these years. He was fine with his position but it would only be a matter of time for Guan family to be kicked out of the ridge if nothing had changed.

Guan Qingheng was worried. The issue never failed to vanquish his joy.

It could not be helped. Guan family had been joining the meeting as more of a listener at the ridge. The family lacked originality, invention, new blood, thus the falling status on the ridge. The purchasing mission never ran really well too. This was because the family's status had fallen to a point that nobody really would treat the orders seriously.

The newest ranking had not been put up on the board, but the worries lingered, since there would be an evaluation in a year or so, which would determine status of the 14 families on the ridge. That would likely be the moment Guan family got officially kicked out of the ridge.

He pondered deeply as he walked the street.

"I have something to do at the ridge."

One line from somewhere caught his attention.

At the ridge? May's Night Ridge? Guan Qingheng flinched.

He lifted his head.

No one from the outside would know much about May Night's Ridge, not even the merchants by the street, since only the top merchants had connection to the ridge in the city. Most people did not even know how the place looked. The residents of the ridge had hardly left the place either, as they would be too busy mastering the arts of alchemy under the strict enforcement of the committee. Unless one was of the purchasing department, one

would probably never have a chance to leave the place, they were even forbidden to join major competitions like the Congregation.

And there was this guest who wanted to do something at the ridge?

Guan Qingheng was surprised, as he dashed towards the crowd.

May Night's Ridge, a mystery, a forbidden area, the sanctuary of alchemy.

Chapter 404: Admiration

Guan Qingheng forced himself into the crowd, and that was when he saw Ye Chong and Feng Su at the center. His sight fell upon Ye Chong eventually. Feng Su might be an attractive precious beauty in the city, but for someone who grew up at the ridge, she was just average.

The sudden participation of Guan Qingheng did not grab any attention. He might be from the ridge, but as much as the ridge was known to the people, the citizens hardly knew him. Probably only those merchants from the authority would recognize him at glances. But practically speaking, he only shared professional relationship with the merchants, thus his identity remained as a top secret among the traders.

"I am certainly curious of Mr. Guan's association with the ridge. Please, do tell us, my Brother Guan, some clarifications would have helped resolving misunderstanding. We highly respect those from the ridge, so we would not allow imposters," said Arbeni sluggishly, his rage seemed to have vanished.

Brother Guan? The boy was part of Guan?

Guan Qingheng had heard something interesting seemingly.

Even though May Night's Ridge had never failed to stir up fear in heart of the people, it was not a place with a frightening sight in actuality. The ridge was an establishment with total 14 families, 14 slots open for families to be honest. The committee would reevaluate the resided families every so often and any underperforming family would be banished from the ridge while newer family would take over. Those who were banished because of below average contribution rate would be forbidden from revealing anything of the ridge to the public, or the family would be blacklisted permanently while receiving severe punishment from the ridge.

Guan Qingheng observed Ye Chong carefully once more. He was holding a wooden spear, the dark tip was not particularly eye-catching, the scent of the spear however... Guan Qingheng could smell the hidden scent of fatality.

The spear was coated with poison. And he roughly estimated the strength of the poison.

That was some strong poison! The expression of Guan Qingheng changed, as he speculated the superior standard of this boy's alchemy.

He then decided to observe quietly at the moment.

"It's top secret. Sorry about that," stated Ye Chong. It was not because he was being uncooperative, rather it was because he simply had no idea what Lunatic Guan asked him there for. She never told him anything else other than visiting the ridge.

But one thing for sure, he did not like being threatened. He had tried his very best to control the hatred as he did not wish to fight the 5 men but that did not mean he would compromise at any condition.

Mu's calmness had influenced Ye Chong deeply but being sociable was never his arsenal.

Assuming a conflict were to happen, Ye Chong would still fight.

He looked at the group with his cold eyes, like a beast with its back lowered, ready to pounce at intensity.

The unspoken hostility had triggered the group.

Feng Su was feeling bad of the situation. She could not believe this familiar-looking boy would decide to initiate a fight right here. It would be bad, the ending of this boy would be unimaginable.

Ye Chong did a quick calculation. To be frank, the chance of his victory was slim, negligibly slim. He could only rely on the intense toxic on his spear at the moment.

The battle did not just happen right away, showing that the 5 fighters still remained cautious of Ye Chong because of his identity.

"Since Mr. Guan has something to do at the ridge...", said Liu Sheng unhurriedly, "I guess we shouldn't be holding you back too much... Providing that you have finished your business there, would you kindly join the Congregation with us?"

A battle did not occur. Instead, immense tolerance was unexpectedly given.

Taking a step back was not in Tackan and Sisko's script, as their face tightened, even though they stayed quiet.

Their behavior had justified their attitude, as Ye Chong had been given the equal status in their mind, judging by the stare, since it was natural for the strong to look at the weak from above in free space zone.

"I cannot guarantee this," said Ye Chong frankly. He could sense the sincerity in Liu Sheng but he could not confirm his schedule when he did not know what could happen at the ridge.

Feng Su could not believe her ears. The boy was such a fool. Everything would have been fine if he just nodded his head!

The reality was quite the contrary. The group gave a smile of admiration upon hearing that line of Ye Chong.

"Hah! Great! Such an honest man!" Laughed Sisko, "I like you. You are different from those who just lie their way out! They assume one blatant lie would have settled us but on countless occasions we had settled them instead! Hahaha!"

The pedestrians shuddered...

Feng Su's tiny heart pumped vigorously. She was so glad that she kept her mouth shut throughout the conversation just now. She really thought of making up a white lie to get away from this.

"Alright, alright," smiled Liu Sheng. "We don't need your guarantee. In 30 days we would be waiting here for you. If you did not make it, we would wait for another, till the day you arrive."

"Okay!" nodded Ye Chong firmly.

"So, my fair lady, we hope for your participation in this Congregation. Please, do join us, will you?" said Liu Sheng as he shifted his sight upon Feng Su. His tone was much more insistent, unlike before.

Feng Su could feel her blood freezing just from the sights of these experts.

Her fair face had just turned snow-white from the pressuring atmosphere created by them.

Her eyes, filled with helpless spite, wafted upon Ye Chong pitifully, as her curves grooved in nervousness.

Such a pitiful sight! And the group seemed to have lost their morality among the pedestrians. How could they force such a weak beauty into this war? The pedestrians would love to voice their anger, but well they were not the Jie experts and never wanted to be the punching bag.

Come on, save the girl, Guan.

Save her.

"I'll be going," said Ye Chong, neglecting Feng Su's begging stare. He gave a nod at the group and turned away.

Feng Su felt she had lost hope as she closed her eyes, with tears dripping.

"Are you still a man?" said one girl from the crowd. She could not bear with this anymore! Disdainfully she shouted as she stepped to the front.

"Right! Are you still a man?"

"How could you do this?" The crowd's anger had been initiated.

"You might be from the ridge, but you are one heartless, weak man!"

"So people from the ridge are shameless as you eh?"

Guan Qingheng was feeling uneasy from the showering comments. Man the fame of May Night's Ridge...

It was a massive verbal attack coming from the crowd, that even the Jie experts flinched.

Ye Chong did not see the need in this. He believed his action was reasonable. Why the criticisms?

"So all of you would like to have a word, eh?" said Sisko, angrily.

Then the noises disappeared. Sisko's eyes had murdered the aggression in people. The pedestrians were looking frightful upon his glance, some even squeezed back into the crowd.

"Save your pity act. Move," said Liu Sheng.

Poor Feng Su, she did not even have the chance to redeem herself. She did not manage to even summon her ride. She could not run away and certainly she could not call for help.

Well, she got to be cooperative at the moment, probably, in order to find the next chance to have a hit-and-run.

A mech owner like her only needed one thing at the moment. Timing, timing, the most natural thing hardest came by. Dammit, only if this boy spoke for her, but no, he was leaving.

Ye Chong sneaked into the crowd right after.

Crack! Thus! On his way he disabled the few attackers who tried to disrupt the heroes in the dark. That was when the pedestrians realized he was no coward, he was a savior!

The crowd was totally silent now, especially when they heard the piercing wails of the tumbling men on the ground.

Ye Chong indifferently walked out of the frightened crowd.

Well first thing's first, guess I should ask people around for the ridge's location.

"You're going to the ridge?" said one man from his back.

Chapter 405: Withering Heart

Ye Chong had been watching this person for awhile, who was tailing him ever since he left the crowd. He was about to make his move when that person spoke up first.

"Do you know May's Night Ridge?" Ye Chong stopped walking and turned around to ask.

Guan Qingheng did not answer Ye Chong, but studied this young man in front of him instead. Up close, Ye Chong gave an even deeper impression to Guan Qingheng. Such weathered eyes could hardly be found on a 20-over-year-old. The coldness in those eyes were also decidedly uninviting.

"Is your surname Guan?" Guan Qingheng pondered for a moment before asking.

That was an interesting question. Just from Guan Qingheng's question alone, Ye Chong could deduce a lot. He could not help but thought of Lunatic Guan, and nodded. "Yes."

Guan Qingheng appeared puzzled. Of the 14 Tribes in May's Night Ridge, only the Guan Family had the surname Guan. However, all these years, only the Eldest Young Miss and Youngest Young Miss had left May's Night Ridge. This young man was probably around 20 years of age - could he be the son of the Eldest Young Miss? Guan Qingheng immediately dismissed the silly idea. How could he even come up with such an impossible answer? Could the Eldest Young Miss possibly bear child at 10?

However, the fact was that only the Eldest Young Miss and Youngest Young Miss had left May's Night Ridge for as long as he remembered.

The Guan Family was in decline, but it was still a true Elder Family compared to the other families. The Guan Family was one of the Five Elder Families that founded May's Night Ridge, and up

until now, its entitlement for a place in the Ridge had never been challenged. For the newer members of May's Night Ridge, they would probably have branches outside of the Ridge. For the Guan Family, which had stayed in the Ridge for who knew how many years, it would not have any branches.

"Perhaps it was a coincidence that this person also had the surname Guan," Guan Qingheng thought to himself with a little sadness.

"What is your business in May's Night Ridge?" Guan Qingheng asked. After all, the Ridge never dealt with outsiders.

Just then, a voice came from behind Guan Qingheng, "I saw, Vice Squad Captain, we should be going." The female voice sounded a touch cynical and mocking.

Guan Qingheng scrunched his eyebrows slightly together. He need not turn around to know that it was Shi Mingbei, Squad Captain of the procurement squad.

Ye Chong looked up to see the woman who interrupted them. She was about 20 years old, with her right hand hovering right by her waist. This was a standard stance for an alchemist. As she approached them both slowly, her right hand never left her waist, where many small pouches hung from her belt in a way that was not easily noticeable. Her fingers were long, and seemed capable of quick movements.

Ye Chong assessed the female alchemist to be very capable.

For the uninitiated, however, she was an entirely different person. Here was a flirty young lady with neat, white teeth, a coquettish smile on her face as her hand rested on her waist while she walked towards the two men. Her slender waist looked like a fragile willow branch, and people could not help but gulp as they watched from the side.

"Oh, who's this young man here? I say, Vice Squad Captain, when

did you get acquainted with such a handsome young man? And you didn't even introduce him to me, it breaks my heart!" She complained teasingly.

Guan Qingheng seemed to try his best to ignore her antics, and replied coldly, "You jest, Captain Shi." Everytime he saw this woman, he could not help but feel repulsed by her.

Shi Mingbei was from the Shi Family. The Shi Family was admitted into the Ridge in the last Ridge meeting. Unlike the historical Guan Family, the Shi Family operated in a more utilitarian manner. This allowed the Shi Family to expand their influence rapidly. Their members could be found in many of the important departments of the Ridge Council.

Guan Qingheng never liked the Shi Family. Besides, his position in the procurement squad was awkward - he was 35, and Shi Mingpei 24, but their positions did not reflect their ranking in seniority.

"Has our Vice Squad Captain forgotten about the rules of the Ridge? This young man here is going to suffer from it!" Shi Mingbei had an attractive smile, but her eyes were shining with a cold gleam.

Guan Qingheng's eyes widened as realized what was happening.

A sweet scent wafted in the air. Shi Mingbei smiled even more invitingly, her eyes narrowing into two crescent moons.

As he studied the two conversing individuals, Ye Chong's nose twitched, and his brows lifted in surprise!

A cold exclamation! The wooden spear in his right hand suddenly turned around and struck!

"Ah!" A woman cried in pain! A shadow hit Shi Mingbei's left shoulder, the huge momentum throwing her backwards, landing her heavily on the ground.

Crack. Guan Qingheng's face twisted with dread. Good hearing

may not be an alchemist's trademark ability, but he could still hear the clear sound of bone cracking. Almost every alchemist was experienced in treating injuries, and Guan Qingheng could tell that Shi Mingbei's scapula sustained a highly comminuted fracture.

Shi Mingbei's expression contorted in pain. Her beautiful face was no longer visible under the torturing pain she felt. She gritted her teeth, her right hand reaching for her waist! She did not know how the other person noticed. She should have used an even stronger alchemy substance.

She finally reached her waist, but stopped abruptly, her entire body freezing like a statue. She dared not move. A large bead of sweat trickled down from the tip of her nose. Her face was white as a sheet, and her eyes were filled with terror!

A jet black spearhead was less than a millimeter away from the tip of her nose!

She could even see the patterns on the spearhead, and the unique scent that came from the black spearhead.

Being admitted to May's Night Ridge implied that the Shi Family was an exemplary in the field of alchemy. As one of the more capable members of the Shi Family, Shi Mingbei was of course well versed in alchemy.

She knew exactly how dangerous the poison on the tip of the spearhead was! She did know the exact components of the alchemy substance on the spearhead, but that did not stop her from deducing its effects. She could tell that even a tiny scratch on her skin from the spearhead would kill her before she could even reach for the antidote.

The spearhead stopped less than a millimeter away from the tip of her nose. The air around her seemed to stop flowing. Already she had forgotten the pain from her injury as she stared at the spearhead, the symbol of death. She dared not move a muscle, in case her opponent thought she was fighting back. Any minor

movement from her enemy would give her a fatal ending.

Her back was drenched with sweat as she felt a chill down her spine.

She watched without moving as the spearhead moved downwards slowly.

The spearhead finally stopped at her waist.

Rip! She felt a chill at her waist. As the spearhead lightly graced her skin, she felt goosebumps all over her, and the terror in her eyes intensified.

The spearhead had ripped a large hole in her clothing, and the fair skin underneath attracted the eyes of passersby like bees to honey.

Ye Chong's eyes were cold and emotionless. He bent down and began to search Shi Mingbei's waist with careful movements. Even while bending down, his other hand was holding the wooden spear steadily, as though his two shoulders belonged to two different human beings.

To the passersby, it was easy to mistake the situation as that of a young man using a wooden spear to threaten the young lady and take advantage of her.

"You wretched b*stard, how dare you act so recklessly? Stop now!" A loud cry interrupted the silence around them. This same script is used for every opening act of chivalry, no matter the era.

Ye Chong did not seem to hear the voice at all.

Shi Mingbei's was growing more and more scared. The person in front of her was too terrifying, and impossibly calm! The loud reproach did not seem to affect him at all. Both his hands were still working steadily, and she could see that he was still moving carefully as before. The spearhead did not waver from its position.

She very much regretted her actions right now.

Ye Chong searched carefully. An alchemist's pouches or bags were very dangerous to mess with. Lethal poisons and the like were often part of their belongings.

Finally, he found it. Ye Chong felt relieved.

In the third row of bags, sixth from the left, Ye Chong poured out some light green powder. As the powder was poured out, the air was filled with a pungent smell. However, Ye Chong poured all the green powder into his mouth without hesitation.

"Who are you?" Even with her unnatural pale face, Shi Mingbei could not help but ask. That this man had noticed her secretly administering Withering Heart and managed to find the cure for it meant that he was no ordinary person.

However, Withering Heart was a concoction unique to May's Night Ridge. How could he know about it? Even she, from the Shi Family, had never heard of the chemical before joining May's Night Ridge.

Withering Heart was a peculiar drug. Once a person inhaled it, that person's heart would stop beating after 24 hours, and there would be no traces of the drug being used. That person's death would by all accounts seem natural.

Every new family that joined May's Night Ridge would be gifted some formulae from the Ridge Council. These formulae could help the new residents improve themselves quickly. Withering Heart was one of the formulae.

Ye Chong straightened himself, his eyes never leaving Shi Mingbei's waist. The cold, emotionless look in his eyes made Shi Mingbei's heart race in fear.

"B*stard! You hear me?" The man who cried earlier roared in anger when he saw Ye Chong ignoring him.

"Tell me, why?" Ye Chong's flat voice had a chilling undertone.

Chapter 406: Where Do You Come From?

Withering Heart was described in great detail in Lunatic Guan's chip, enough to make Ye Chong suspect that it was one of Lunatic Guan's own inventions. That was how Ye Chong managed to identify the drug the moment he smelled it.

Inhaling Withering Heart carelessly, even in small amounts, would have highly detrimental effects. For someone who knew so much about Withering Heart like Ye Chong, he was aware of the consequences.

Since his life was threatened, Ye Chong retaliated.

The truth was, Ye Chong was not too angry about it. These situations were normal for him. On the contrary, he was feeling very calm. He was more interested in the motive behind the woman's attack. His reckless killing in the past had taught him much, and he had since learned to think before jumping to conclusions. Besides, this woman was most likely from May's Night Ridge. He was not intimidated by May's Night Ridge per say, but Lunatic Guan had asked to visit the place, so he decided to tread with care.

If it was his younger self, Ye Chong would probably have just killed the woman who ambushed him outright. Now, however, Ye Chong did not mind stopping at some light form of punishment.

His cold, severe voice reverberated in the air, and everyone around him felt shuddered involuntarily!

"You ... You ..." Shi Mingbei stuttered through gritted teeth. She was afraid. All her life she had been bold and daring where others wavered, but now she was truly afraid!

"B*stard, what's there to proof by bullying a woman?" The man was loud, but Ye Chong could hear the fear and weakness behind his facade.

In any case, Ye Chong did not pay much attention to the man. He was focused entirely on the woman who had ambushed him.

"How dare you!" A low and menacing voice was heard.

Suddenly, Ye Chong felt danger coming towards him. He leapt to the side without hesitation.

Swish swish swish!

Half a meter away from where he stood, green smoke wafted into the air. There was a sharp, unpleasant smell coming from a small puddle of green liquid on the ground. The liquid corroded the floor, which turned charred black. The green smoke came from this small puddle.

What a powerful corrosive, definitely no less powerful than the Liquid of Shang!

Ye Chong watched the spot nervously.

A menacing looking middle aged man was looking at Ye Chong coldly. He wore a brown, old shirt, which Ye Chong could see was full of patches. His sunken cheeks gave him an angular look.

Ye Chong did not fight back. That move was obviously just a warning. If the man was serious, that green liquid would land exactly where he was standing, and not half a meter off the mark.

Guan Qingheng's expression turned respectful when he saw the middle aged man.

The middle aged man studied Ye Chong for a moment, and went straight to Shi Mingbei. He crouched down, examined her, and muttered, "Hmm, comminuted fracture, odds of recovery are at 70 percent."

When Shi Mingbei saw the middle aged man, she immediately turned docile like a kitten, and much of the tension was drained from her face.

"What happened?" The middle aged man finally stood up and

asked plainly. Both Guan Qingheng and Shi Mingbei did not reply.

"Who are you?" Ye Chong stared fixedly at the newcomer. The middle aged man felt very familiar, with an aura that he could identify as Lunatic Guan's. This aura made Ye Chong feel threatened.

The middle aged man turned around and scrutinized Ye Chong closely.

What sharp eyes! Ye Chong did not expect an alchemist do have such piercing eyes.

"Are you the one who injured her?" The coldness in the middle aged man's voice could not be missed.

The bystanders who were standing around before the middle aged man appeared had all vanished. Even the brave man who yelled at Ye Chong scurried away quickly when he saw the middle aged man.

"Yes," Ye Chong answered with his usual brevity. He was prepared to make his move any moment now, as his muscles tensed in anticipation. The September Lan Family's techniques shone brightly through him. Ye Chong could now control all the muscles in his body in incredible ways, and unleash astonishing power.

Unexpectedly, the middle aged man did not attack, but looked at him straight in the eye and asked without expression, "Why did you hurt her?"

The middle aged man was the exact opposite of Lunatic Guan. One was severe and rigid, the other lazy and carefree. Logically speaking, they were two entirely different types of people. However, Ye Chong could not help but be reminded of the teacher who introduced him to alchemy, Lunatic Guan, when he looked at the middle aged man in front of him.

"Self defense!" Ye Chong answered as briefly as possible. His

answer surprised the man, from the look in his eyes. However, the middle aged man quickly recovered himself.

He turned to the other two and said, "Both of you, describe what happened." His calm words were undefiable.

Guan Qingheng was intimidated by the look in the middle aged man's eyes, and told the full story.

When Guan Qingheng described Ye Chong's wanting to enter May's Night Ridge, the middle aged man stole a glance at Ye Chong, and Ye Chong saw the flash of disbelief in the man's eyes. When the man heard that Ye Chong claimed to have the surname Guan, the middle aged man no longer tried to hide his surprise as he watched Ye Chong keenly.

Ye Chong was not afraid, and looked back calmly at the man.

When the man heard that Ye Chong could recognize Withering Heart, his expression turned serious.

After Guan Qingheng was finished, the middle aged man turned quiet, thinking to himself. After a while, he lifted his head and asked, "You said you're going to May's Night Ridge?"

"Yes." Ye Chong nodded.

"What business do you have in May's Night Ridge?" The middle aged man continued. He was indifferent in nature, but this hooked his curiosity. He believed he was good in reading people, and this young man seemed the calm type, who would not do something for no reason. He must have his reasons for going to May's Night Ridge. More importantly, the young man had said that his teacher asked him to go, and that was strange. All alchemists knew of the rules of May's Night Ridge. If this young man could recognize Withering Heart, then how could he not know of the rules? On the other hand, he was also interested in knowing how Ye Chong could recognize Withering Heart.

As expected, Ye Chong replied, "My teacher asked me to go to

May's Night Ridge. It's her hometown." Lunatic Guan did not specify exactly what she wanted him to do there, so Ye Chong could only provide a vague answer.

"Ah!" All three of them gasped, including the injured Shi Mingbei.

"Your teacher is?" The middle aged man looked at Ye Chong solemnly.

Guan Qingheng's face reddened, and his breathing turned short. The surname Guan ... His teacher ... Hometown ... These words flashed in his mind, and he shuddered at the thought that came to him!

"Her surname is Guan," Ye Chong replied. He did not know Lunatic Guan's full name, after all. Guan Qingheng's breathing even faster as he gulped anxiously.

"Guan?" The middle aged man took some time to digest that information. Suddenly, his eyes widened, and he lifted his head to look straight at Ye Chong with an odd expression.

After a full half a minute, the middle aged man finally spoke again with great difficulty, "Is your teacher a woman?"

"Yes!" Ye Chong nodded calmly as he answered.

"Ah!" Guan Qingheng could not help but gasp again, unable to suppress his excitement. He could guess roughly who Ye Chong's teacher was.

The middle aged man looked at Ye Chong with mixed emotions, and said, "I believe I know who she is. I will report your matter to the Ridge Council, and the Ridge Council will make the final decision. Before the decision is made, you cannot enter May's Night Ridge." He then turned to Guan Qingheng and said, "You are temporarily relieved of your duty as Vice Captain of the procurement squad. Bring this young man to the Ridge Lodgings to stay in the meantime, see to his needs while the Council makes its

decision." He spoke like a man of high ranking, as though Guan Qingheng was his subordinate.

"Yes Sir!" Guan Qingheng accepted his orders immediately, his eyes positively radiating with joy, like Ye Chong was some kind of living treasure. Even Ye Chong could not help but feel a little irked. He did not understand why the man would behave that way.

"You will return with me for now," the middle aged man said to Shi Mingbei. "Yes Sir," Shi Mingbei assented respectfully, bowing her head low. However, Ye Chong saw the hate in her eyes right before she bowed. She was trying her best to maintain a meek expression on her pale face.

"Wait!" Ye Chong cried coldly. The middle aged man was about to leave, but now he turned to Ye Chong and asked, "What other questions do you have?"

Ye Chong looked at the man calmly in the eye and asked something wholly unexpected, "What do you have to prove that you're from May's Night Ridge?"

Chapter 407: Proof

"Proof?" The middle aged man was stunned for a moment, his rigid face breaking into a thin smile. "As expected of her student! You think just like her. Well, what proof do you have in mind?"

Guan Qingheng and Shi Mingbei were both very, very surprised. The rigid middle aged man had shown such open emotions. It was unthinkable. Even more unthinkable was the fact that someone actually asked for proof of their identities as Ridge residents!

Well, how should they prove themselves? Ye Chong began to think.

The middle aged man studied Ye Chong with interest.

If Lunatic Guan was really from May's Night Ridge, then she must have been a member of the alchemy school here. If this man was really from May's Night Ridge, then he must come from the same school as Lunatic Guan.

The information in Lunatic Guan's chip had a huge variety, and knowledge from other schools such as Green Tempest were abundant. Ye Chong had studied long and hard before identifying information that were from her own school.

If they were indeed from the same school of alchemy, then the man must be well versed with this information.

"I'll ask you three questions. If you can answer them, I'll know you are from May's Night Ridge," Ye Chong said calmly. Skill based knowledge cannot be faked, after all.

"Oh," the middle aged man seemed interested as he replied, "Alright, ask away." Guan Qingheng and Shi Mingbei were still shell shocked as they stared at the middle aged man.

"The questions must not be too easy," Ye Chong thought to himself. However, he quickly came up with his first one, "What is the core principle of the Supplanting technique in alchemy?"

This question was one that Ye Chong had spent a long time studying Lunatic Guan's chip before realizing the answer to it. In terms of difficulty, it was not the hardest problems presented in the chip, but Ye Chong found it to be an important principle in Lunatic Guan's school of alchemy.

The silence that followed was so intense that you could hear a pin drop!

The middle aged man's expression was focused. He bowed his head in thought, his eyes shining brightly. He grinded his feet against the floor unconsciously, but to the people who knew him like Guan Qingheng and Shi Mingbei, it was a sign of him in deep thought.

However, both Guan Qingheng and Shi Mingbei did not study the man closely. They too lapsed into thought. The two of them were not as learned as the middle aged man, but they were still far more capable than the average alchemist. They too were trying to answer this question.

After 10 minutes, the three of them stayed as they were without moving at all.

After 30 minutes, Guan Qingheng's forehead was covered with sweat, and Shi Mingbei's pale face grew paler still. The middle aged man continued to grind his feet against the ground, digging a shallow depression in the ground.

After one hour, Guan Qingheng was the first of them to give up. He was drenched in sweat, and he was no longer looked alert, his face drained of blood. Prolonged deep thinking exhausted one's energy at an astonishing rate. He sat down heavily on the ground and panted, without care for his image. Only his eyes looked at Ye Chong intently.

After another half an hour, Shi Mingbei gave up as well. Her beautiful eyes were full of puzzlement. Just who was this young man? Was his teacher really from the Ridge? To her, the young

man seemed more and more mysterious.

After three hours, the middle aged man inhaled deeply, his eyes clearing up and he shook his head and said, "I'll need about half a year of research to answer that question, and only if things proceed smoothly. I cannot give you an answer right now." He sounded tired. The long thinking session had exhausted him greatly.

Ye Chong was patient as a saint. He watched the middle aged man think for three hours straight without even a trace of impatience, and his expression was still calm and composed.

Ye Chong shook his head. "If you can't answer this question, the next two are a lot harder. I'm sorry, you failed to prove your identity with by providing an answer." His calmly delivered verdict made the middle aged man blush, but he quickly got himself together.

Ye Chong did not mean to be sarcastic. He was only stating a fact. His next two questions were so hard that even he himself had not managed to solve them. He had wanted to build up the difficulty of his questions, but did not expect them to fail at the first question.

They had failed to answer such a simple question. Ye Chong was a little disappointed by them. He was convinced at this point that the middle aged man was not from May's Night Ridge. He believed that anyone from Lunatic Guan's school should at least be able to answer that question, even if that person was not on the same level as his teacher.

Ye Chong did not know it, but May's Night Ridge was completely different from what he imagined it to be.

Now, Ye Chong was interested with another question - why did these three people try to get on his good side now? Ye Chong felt wary.

That woman in particular had attacked him, and he saw her

vengeful eyes from earlier clearly. He knew her type. Given the chance, she would not hesitate to exact revenge on him.

Ye Chong had initially thought that they were from May's Night Ridge, so he tried to prevent the situation from escalating. Now that he was convinced that they were not of the Ridge, Ye Chong felt the need to eliminate them. He did not want to leave any loose ends that would haunt him later.

His entire body tensed up in an instant to a state of preparation. Ye Chong looked at the three people with the eyes of a hunter.

Guan Qingheng's long harboured negative feelings evaporated. He felt refreshed like never before, and his heart was filled with joy. If this young man was really her student, then there was hope still for the Guan Family. Guan Qingheng believed that the young man would not ignore the Guan Family's situation. Perhaps that was why she had asked him to come here.

Unlike the other two, he was a true member of the Guan Family. Ye Chong's question may have stumbled him, but it further reaffirmed his assumption. He remembered clearly that right before she left, the only project that she had not completed yet was on the Supplanting method. To think that she had reached such heights in her research!

As expected of her student!

Even this student of hers was not an average joe! Guan Qingheng looked at Ye Chong with approval. What a calm and steady young man. No matter how he looked at it, Guan Qingheng was fond him.

"Tsk tsk, such a young talent, you don't see them everywhere! I say, he'll probably rise into one of the Guan Family's leading characters," he thought to himself.

Guan Qingheng's eyes never left Ye Chong.

Huh, what's with him?

Guan Qingheng was shocked. Killing intent! The words came to

him immediately, and he was caught off guard. However, with his sharp mind, he instantly understood the importance of this moment.

"Wait!" Given the urgency, Guan Qingheng cried out loud without care for appropriateness.

Everyone looked to Guan Qingheng, and even Ye Chong held back his next move.

"Err, em, err, that ... That ..." Guan Qingheng did not make any sense. Suddenly, an idea came to him, and he spoke more fluently, "I know how we can prove our identities."

"Oh?" Ye Chong's eyes were fixed at Guan Qingheng. The other two looked to him as well.

"If your teacher is really the one we're talking about it, I believe you'll know these." Guan Qingheng looked proud.

Ye Chong watched him silently.

Guan Qingheng's fervent eyes focused on Ye Chong as he pronounced his next words slowly, "Tassleflower Red, Ghue Solution, Blue Thread Cultivation Method, Bilayered Liquid Tempering Technique!"

As Guan Qingheng spoke every name, the middle aged man's expression turned more and more respectful, while Shi Mingbei looked confused. She had never heard of any of them.

Ye Chong's calm expression did not change. Guan Qingheng turned anxious. If this young man had never heard of these terms, then ...

"What can these prove?" Ye Chong asked.

It was the middle aged man who explained, "If you are really her student, then I believe you must have heard of these terms. These are the May's Night Ridge Guan Family's most famous inventions in the last century. If I remember correctly, the Bilayered Liquid

Tempering Technique is your teacher's work."

Shi Mingbei realized then what they were talking about. She immediately felt self conscious. The Shi Family had only joined May's Night Ridge for a short time, and could not compete with the older residents such as the Guan Family.

Ye Chong looked at all three of them quietly, and they began to feel nervous.

Guan Qingheng's heart was racing. His mouth felt dry, and it was difficult to breathe.

"Alright, you have given your proof." Ye Chong nodded. The terms that Guan Qingheng had said were all in Lunatic Guan's chip. They were quite special compared to the other contents in the chip. From their records, he could see that Lunatic Guan had never stopped working on improving on them. Of all of them, the Bilayered Liquid Tempering Technique was modified the most. Ye Chong could see no less than five versions of the technique, and the latest version had an unmistakable influence from the Five Galaxies.

To think that they all originated from the Guan Family! Ye Chong gained a much better understanding of the reasoning behind the organization of information in the chip. Many of his earlier confusions were now cleared up.

Hence, he nodded.

At that moment, Guan Qingheng nearly died of happiness!

Chapter 408: Stories of the Past

Ridge Lodgings was only a normal looking house. From the outside, no one would have guessed that it was a building under May's Night Ridge, the Sacred Place of Alchemy. A normal looking brick wall ran along the building's perimeter, reaching seven meters tall, so that outsiders could not see within. Poisonous vines grew along the walls to discourage intruders.

This seemingly normal place was of course not easily recognized by the common people. However, an alchemist would definitely keep a wide berth. The surroundings of the building was littered with all kinds of traps. These traps were devised from plants, and they could be toxic, hallucination inducing, numbing, or harmful in many other ways. They were so many that Ye Chong felt overwhelmed just looking at them. The way the traps were designed were also impressive.

As expected of the territory of May's Night Ridge! Ye Chong grew thoughtful. Perhaps only May's Night Ridge could afford such methods. Up until now, Lunatic Guan was the most powerful alchemist Ye Chong had ever met. May's Night Ridge, Lunatic Guan's hometown, was even more interesting due to the fact that his teacher came from this place. Many times he had wondered if May's Night Ridge was the zenith of alchemy.

"You have the smoke pearl, so most of these traps are useless against you. However, it's better to err on the side of caution. There are some traps here that would be troublesome even for members of the Ridge," Guan Qingheng warned with concern. As a resident of May's Night Ridge, he recognized the smoke pearl on Ye Chong's hand immediately.

Guan Qingheng understood that the Guan Family's future would very likely depend on this young man.

They slowly made their way across, avoiding the traps. Ye Chong

and Guan Qingheng reached the house about 10 minutes later. Inside the house was an entirely different scenery. Unlike the dangerous terrain outside, the courtyard inside was like a large garden. Flowers bloomed freely, and the air was thick with the scent of flowers.

In between the flowers, many gardeners were tending to the plants with care. These people ignored Ye Chong and Guan Qingheng completely, not even lifting their heads in acknowledgement.

The green environment did not exactly lifted Ye Chong's spirits. On the contrary, he was secretly cautious. He could recognize most of the plants here, and they were largely famous for their harmful qualities or rarity.

Guan Qingheng led Ye Chong to a room, which was fitted with all the essential sundries and items for a comfortable stay. The materials used were well selected, and the craftsmanship was outstanding. However, the room did not feel extravagant at all.

"This is the guest room. Please stay here for now. Once the Ridge Council approves your entrance, we will return home. I believe that the Tribe Leader must be anxious to see you," Guan Qingheng said with a smile.

"Tribe Leader?" Ye Chong raised his brows in confusion. "Why would he want to see me?"

Guan Qingheng was taken aback by the question, but smiled as he said, "You must be unaware of what's happening right now. The Eldest Young Miss is always like that, hehe, she must have kept you in the dark."

"Eldest Young Miss?" Ye Chong asked.

"Yes. Do you know your teacher's name?" Guan Qingheng asked.

Ye Chong shook his head and answered firmly, "I don't." Ye Chong had only ever knew her as Lunatic Guan, and nothing else.

"As I suspected!" Guan Qingheng laughed wryly and mumbled to himself, "The Eldest Young Miss is still as the same as before." He noticed Ye Chong's confusion, however, and described the Eldest Young Miss to him.

Based on Guan Qingheng's description of Lunatic Guan's looks, they appeared to be the same person. However, they had very different personalities. According to Guan Qingheng, Lunatic Guan was an extremely hardworking woman. However, Ye Chong remembered her as a lazy drunkard, a bad influence overall.

Nonetheless, since she appeared roughly as Guan Qingheng described, Ye Chong was ready to believe that Lunatic Guan was the Eldest Young Miss that Guan Qingheng was talking about.

As Guan Qingheng explained patiently, Ye Chong began to understand his teacher more.

"The Tribe Leader is busy with administrative matters that there was not much time left for alchemy. The Eldest Young Miss was quick to take up leadership in our Tribe's research efforts. Back then, the Eldest Young Miss was extremely talented, and no one in the Ridge can outmatch her. That was a good time for our Guan Family. The Bilayer Liquid Tempering Technique was the invention of the Eldest Young Miss when she was 14 years old. When people in the Ridge heard of the news, they knew immediately that the Guan Family was gifted with a prodigy," he spoke softly with deep pride.

"Almost everyone in the Ridge believed then that the Guan Family's position in the Ridge would be secure for at least five decades to come. However, an incident occurred unexpectedly two years later. That year, the Youngest Young Miss went missing." Guan Qingheng's open expression turned grim. He spoke through gritted teeth, "Those d*mned child abductors, they should all be killed! In fact, they suffered heavily after. Humph. How could we allow the Ridge's power to be challenged? Back then, elites from all 14 families of the Ridge were deployed. All the Abductor's bases of

operation on Guang Hua planet were cleansed with the child abductors' blood."

Ye Chong was no stranger to bloodshed, but as he could not help but shudder inside as he listened to Guan Qingheng. He could imagine just how horrible a scene it was back then.

"Unfortunately, we still did not find the Youngest Young Miss. You should know that the Eldest Young Miss loved the Youngest Young Miss very much. Soon after the mass attacks, the Eldest Young Miss left the Ridge quietly to find the Youngest Young Miss."

The Youngest Young Miss that Guan Qingheng was talking about must be Zhu Ling. Ye Chong now understood Lunatic Guan's background better. This meant that Zhu Ling's hometown was also May's Night Ridge.

Regrettably, Zhu Ling, Mu, Shang and the rest were lost to him. Ye Chong said nothing, and continued listening to Guan Qingheng.

"After the Eldest Young Miss left, our Tribe almost went stagnant with progress. Since almost all the huge projects were related to the Eldest Young Miss, her departure caused us to halt most of these projects. Everyone in the Tribe tried their best, but we did not achieve much progress. The Guan Family's status in the Ridge took a nosedive, and we have now reached a critical situation!"

Guan Qingheng stole a glance at Ye Chong. Ye Chong was still calm as ever. The truth was, he could understand roughly why Lunatic Guan asked him to visit the planet of Guang Hua. However, Lunatic Guan must not have put too much hope in him. After all, Guang Hua was a planet in the free space zone. It was no guarantee that he could make it here.

Perhaps, her leaving this chip behind was only an act of desperation, clinging onto her last bit of hope!

As though the idea had hit a soft spot in him, Ye Chong's icy cold

heart thawed a little.

Guan Qingheng grew frantic when he saw Ye Chong's indifference, and said, "You are the student of the Eldest Young Miss, please do not just ignore the Tribe's crisis!" For the moment, he did not speak as respectfully as he was earlier, pleading to this young man.

"Dear God! Please, please, don't let him be as irresponsible as the Eldest Young Miss!" Guan Qingheng prayed inside, but quickly recalled then that Ye Chong's teacher was a very irresponsible person by nature. He felt a sense of foreboding.

Ye Chong did not answer Guan Qingheng, but asked a question of his own, "Who was the woman just now?"

"Are you talking about Shi Mingbei?" Guan Qingheng was taken aback by the question, but quickly resumed his respectful behavior, hoping to win the young man's favor. "She is of the Shi Family."

"Shi Family?"

"Yes. There are 14 families in the Ridge. The Shi Family has been accepted to enter the Ridge in the last Ridge Council meeting. Their members are generally more active." Guan Qingheng sounded disapproving of them.

"Why did she attack me?" Ye Chong was curious. He could figure out her motives.

Guan Qingheng explained, "You have never been in the Ridge, so you're not familiar with our internal affairs. No information from within the Ridge must be known to outsiders. This law is absolute. However, the Ridge cannot avoid contact with the outside world, hence it was inevitable that some outsiders would find out details of the Ridge without meaning to. Members of the Ridge are divided when it comes to the policy against these outsiders. On the one hand, some believe that a warning is good enough. Most of the

older members of the Ridge, like our Tribe, are on this side. On the other hand, some believe that information about the Ridge must never be known to outsiders, and will take drastic measures to ensure this. Supporters of this view are mostly the newer families and tribes, and the Shi Family is one of them. There is no official decision on the right policy, however, so both sides have decided to not interfere with each other."

"I see," Ye Chong replied without expression.

"Don't worry too much about it. It's only a small matter. Once the Ridge Council approves of your entry, it won't be an issue anymore. Then, if you're looking for pay back later, there are many ways to go about it. The Ridge usually does not care for such matters," Guan Qingheng offered his advice, with a touch of sadness in his eyes.

The crux of the matter was, will the Ridge Council approve of Ye Chong? In the past few years, the Ridge had been receiving new blood faster than ever before, and the situation within the Ridge had grown more complicated. Guan Qingheng was uncertain about the final outcome.

Chapter 409: Entering the Ridge

Guan Zhengyuan was livid when he left the Ridge Council meeting. A middle aged man drew up to his side from behind and spoke with regret, "Zhengyuan, I tried!" This middle aged man was the super alchemist that Ye Chong encountered earlier.

Guang Zhengyuan smiled bitterly and said, "Yan, please. The kid's life would've been forfeit if it wasn't for you. I haven't even thanked you for that."

The middle aged man's cold face mimicked his bitter expression. "Don't worry about that. We've grown up together, and I've always thought of Ling as a sister. I feel so guilty, now that I failed to ensure her student's safe passage into the Ridge."

Guan Yuanzheng seemed to remember his sister's mean antics, and could not help but smile on his face. "My dear sister, I wonder how she's doing these days. If it wasn't for the Shi Family this time ..." The thought of the Shi Family brought down his mood once again, and his eyes burned with the fire of anger.

The Shi Family had interfered, causing the unexpected outcome from the Council meeting.

"The Shi Family!" The middle aged man humped coldly. The atmosphere turned tense as the man looked into the distance and said calmly, "It's been a long time since I was in the field, people seemed to have forgotten about me!" As a close friend of his, Guan Zhengyuan could sense that the man was having the urge to kill.

Guan Zhengyuan knew exactly how powerful his good friend was. Before Guan Ling became famous, Yan was the unchallenged number one alchemist amongst his peers of the younger generation. Guan Leng's entrance into the scene had robbed him of his glory. Later on, the Ridge Council had given him the position of Head Envoy, and so he was often away from the Ridge. With that, his fame within the Ridge fell. Nonetheless, Guan Zhengyuan

knew that his good friend had grown to be extraordinarily capable during his many years away.

Besides that, Yan had the backing of the Hua Family, an aristocratic family that had a long history like the Guan Family. All these years, Yan and the Hua Family had assisted the Guan Family, or the Guan Family would have been pushed out of the Ridge by the newer residents of the place, led by the Shi Family.

Older aristocratic alchemy families such as the Guan Hua Families were more moderate in their actions, unlike the more arrogant and bombastic younger families. The Shi Family's actions had really offended his good friend this time. Guan Zhengyuan was not particularly talented in alchemy, but he was always better at grasping the bigger picture. That was why the last head of the family had entrusted the position to him, and not the then most talented alchemist in the family, Guan Ling.

Guan Zhengyuan understood that, once Yan made his move, it will ignite the war between the old and new forces within the Ridge. This war would be waged on an unprecedented scale.

However, that was not on the top of his priority list at the moment. He was now thinking about his sister's student, now staying at the Ridge Lodgings.

"Yan, do you think that the boy can enter the Ridge?" Guan Zhengyuan asked with concern.

Hua Yan's expression was odd when he replied, "I don't know, but Ling's student is definitely not someone mediocre!"

Back in the Lodgings.

Guan Qingheng looked terrible. He never expected the Council's decision to be this.

"So?" On the contrary, Ye Chong was calm. He was used to all kinds of trouble. To him, there will always be a solution to the decision of the Council, no matter what it was.

"The Ridge Council wants you to enter the Ridge alone, without any guides," Guan Qingheng forced the words out of his mouth.

"Oh," Ye Chong still looked as composed as ever, without any emotional response.

"What do you think of the security around the Lodgings?" Seeing Ye Chong's response, Guan Qingheng asked him.

"It's excellent," Ye Chong answered truthfully. In fact, it was the most powerful alchemy based defense system he had ever seen. Each trap was all well designed, packed with a mean punch, and the traps worked together in good combinations. Even with Ye Chong's smoke pearl, he would not even try to breach the Lodgings' walls by himself. Ye Chong believed it to be out of his league.

Guan Qingheng looked positively hopeless. "Compared to the route that leads to the Ridge's entrance, these are child's play. The road to the Ridge is a hundred times more dangerous! You may not know it, but every new technique invented would be first tested on the route. Anyone who left the Ridge for a substantial amount of time would not dare to enter the Ridge by themselves. Ever since the day May's Night Ridge was founded, people have never stopped improving the security along that route." In fact, Guan Qingheng himself had always taken extra care when he made his way in or out of the Ridge, for fear of triggering any traps.

Wasn't this clearly meant to kill him? Looking at Ye Chong's indifferent behaviour, Guan Qingheng cursed inwardly at the people in the Ridge Council.

"I see." Ye Chong thought about the situation for a moment.

"Alright, I accept." With his evenly delivered announcement, Guan Qingheng could hardly believe his own ears.

"What? He accepted?" Shi Mingbei laughed coldly. Her face was

unnaturally pale, and her shoulder was wrapped up in thick layers of bandages. Her voice was filled with deep hatred as she said, "What a stupid idiot, let's see you escape this!"

The Shi Family's head watched Shi Mingbei with an aching heart, and consoled her, "Don't worry, he'll die for sure. No one can travel the route themselves and survive. There is no person alive on this world that has of that kind of strength."

Just then, someone stumbled in panickedly and said, "Bad news! Bad news! My Lord, the Hua Family is here for trouble!"

The head of the Shi Family's lifted a single brow with deliberate indifference, and asked, "How dare the old fools come to challenge us! How many are there?"

"Only - only one of them!" The person stuttered, obviously shaken.

"Humph, for shame! It's just one person, and already you're panicking, a disgrace to the Shi Family!" Shi Wuwei felt humiliated by his subordinate's lack of composure, and scolded him out loud. He turned to Shi Mingbei and said gently, "Rest here for now, I'll go and take a look." Shi Mingbei nodded meedly.

Hua Yan stood before the door of the Shi Family's house calmly. Already there were five people lying unconscious by the door. Hua Yan was in his typical rigid self, but his lone form was like a towering figure in the eyes of the Shi Family. Everyone in the Shi Family looked at him with deep respect and fear.

"Is this what the Shi Family's capable of?" Hua Yan asked coldly, with a killing intent radiating off him. The Ridge Council had never been against challenges between families, but in fact encouraged them. That was why challenges like these were common.

This was a time of turmoil for May's Night Ridge. This was the day the long forgotten member of the Ridge, the elite of the

younger generation of his time, Hua Yan, challenged the Shi Family by himself, defeated nine of his opponents and left with ease!

The Ridge was in an uproar! Hua Yan's former glory was restored once again. The Hua Family's fame rose because of the incident. This incident also marked the beginning of the war between the old and new factions in the Ridge.

After many years of peace, May's Night Ridge was once again troubled by challenges between families and tribes. The Ridge was plunged into disorder. Despite the escalating situation, the Ridge Council remained silent on the matter. The most peaceful families were the Hua Family and Guan Family. The Hua Family, with the Grandmaster level Hua Yan as their protector, was unchallenged. The Guan Family was also left in peace, since Hua Yan had warned against any hostility towards the Guan Family.

Unlike the Hua and Guan Families, the other 12 families were all involved in the mess that followed. As the situation worsened, Guan Zhengyuan was also affected. He knew that the peace at the Guan Family was only temporary. If things continue as they were, sooner or later someone would come and break the peace. In the end, Hua Yan was of the Hua Family, and the Hua Family had their own status to protect.

Guan Zhengyuan understood his situation clearly. The time for a reshuffling of the Ridge's power hierarchy was upon them. Unfortunately, the Guan Family was the weakest of all the contenders.

Ye Chong knew nothing of the situation in the Ridge. However, even if he was aware, he would have been unmoved by it all.

Guan Qingheng led Ye Chong to the route that would bring him to the Ridge's entrance. Along the way, Guan Qingheng continued to impress upon Ye Chong a rough overview of the route, about where the traps were and ways to avoid them. He even drew a

sketch of the place for Ye Chong. However, he knew that despite his efforts, the traps were well designed, and one who had never travelled the route would find it hard to imagine the treacherous place.

"So I just need to make my way there?" Ye Chong pointed at the destination marked on the Guan Qingheng's sketch.

Guan Qingheng nodded. "Yes, once you reach that point, you'll be safe. There will be someone waiting for you there. Aside from the territories of each family residing in the Ridge, there are no other traps within. If you can travel this route and survive, the other traps will not be a problem for you."

After a good round of warnings, Guan Qingheng took a last, worried glance at Ye Chong and took his leave.

On this very day, the Ridge was unusually silent. No challenges were issued anywhere in the Ridge. Everyone was focused on the event that was Ye Chong's attempt to enter the Ridge. The reason for Hua Yan's challenge against the Shi Family was well known. Almost everyone believed that the young man would never survive the journey. What worried them was Hua Yan's response once the young man died along the route to the Ridge.

To them, the young man was already dead the moment the Council made its decision!

Ye Chong looked at the time, and sat down, doing nothing else.

He sat, and waited for five hours straight. Night came, and the route towards the Ridge was enveloped in darkness. Soon, the place was pitch black, impenetrable to sight.

In the darkness, Ye Chong stood up, his eyes shining as bright as the stars. Before him, Moon King stood silently, with its half lidded bionic eyes looking into the distance. The two crescent blades on its wrists gleamed coldly in the night.

Chapter 410: Homecoming

Sicilique was nodding off idly at the end of the route that led to the Ridge. In his dreams, he was still cursing the old geezers in the Ridge Council. Those d*mn old fools, to think that they would order him to welcome the young man to the Ridge. Sicilique was not exactly lazy, but he was completely uninterested in this meaningless task.

The young man was obviously set up to die, how could he possibly survive the route towards the Ridge? Everyone in the Ridge knew that. That night, the Ridge was silent. The streets were empty.

The recent chaos in the Ridge had also affected the Pawe Family, which he belonged to. Challenges were issued here and there, and the Ridge was filled with battle hungry people overnight.

The peace today was like the calm before the storm, and it was suffocating.

Hence, when Sicilique was here, he decided to just sleep for the night. When the time came, he would just report to the Ridge Council and be done with the whole affair.

He was in deep sleep when he felt someone pat on his back.

"Who is it?" He was angry. It was already late at night, who dared to mess with him now? More importantly, he was interrupted from a very nice dream, and that made him very angry. He was mostly muttering, but in fact his sleep had not quite left him.

"Please, are you the one sent to welcome me?" A cold but polite voice inquired.

"Welcome you ..." Amidst his sleepiness, Sicilique's brain awakened violently. He opened his sleepy eyes and saw a slender, thin and unfamiliar young man looking back at him. Sicilique was beyond shocked.

"Ah!" Sicilique's sharp cry broke the peace of the night, like a cat which had its tail stepped on.

"You ... You ... You're the one ... The one ... Who's entering the Ridge?" Sicilique stuttered incoherently.

The man was not speaking clearly, but Ye Chong understood him. He nodded and answered, "Yes."

It was destined to be a day of unrest. Guan Family's young member had successfully travelled the route that led to the Ridge. The news spread like wildfire across the Ridge.

It came down onto the Ridge like a bolt of lightning!

Everyone in the Ridge understood that this Grandmaster level alchemist's return would disrupt the power balance in the Ridge. No one slept well that night.

Ye Chong was brought straight to the Guan Family. In fact, when the Ridge Council was informed of the outcome, people had expected Ye Chong to undergo a round of questioning by the Council, but it never happened. Instead, he had went straight to the Guan Family. To everybody's surprise, the Council had adopted an odd strategy in this situation, opting to act as though nothing had happened.

Sicilique left the Guan Family feeling jealous of the latter. With such a strong alchemist joining their ranks, the Guan Family would be able to survive their crisis.

Every alchemist knew that a Grandmaster level alchemist was far more powerful than their average counterparts, despite being outnumbered.

No one doubted the power of this mysterious young alchemist of the Guan Family. The route was the only way to enter the Ridge, and it was littered with traps that represented the best of the Ridge's alchemist abilities. To travel the path unscathed was an act no one in the Ridge could promise to reenact. In fact, even the now

famous Hua Yan had once admitted that he could not travel the route by only his own abilities. Now, who would dare to question the strength of this young alchemist? Who would even think of questioning his power?

The Guan Family was lit up brightly, its members celebrating. Ever since Guan Ling left the Guan Family, the place had never seen so much activity before. Every member of the Guan Family was jubilant. As an aristocratic family with a long, celebrated history, they had more pride than average people. All these years, however, the cruel facts of reality had borne down on them. They could only watch from the side as other families received more benefits and enjoyed their prestige. Often, they had to quietly endure the condescending glares from other people.

The long endured pressure was finally shed, and every Guan Family member stood tall and smiled widely. Those who had witnessed the birth of the Eldest Young Miss, Guan Ling, were still alive, and they repeated again and again the story of the Guan Family's former glory.

Now, they finally had hope, a hope to rebuild the Guan Family's name. As a student of the Eldest Young Miss, the mysterious young man was sure to be greeted warmly by the family. The fact that he survived the route to the Ridge unscathed further propelled his reputation skyward.

The only thing that perplexed them was the wooden spear in Ye Chong's hand. An alchemist with a spear? As expected, the student of the Eldest Young Miss was no ordinary person.

Right now, Ye Chong was in Guan Zhengyuan's room.

"You are Ling's student?" Guan Zhengyuan kept a calm expression, but his betrayed the happiness in him.

"Ling?" Ye Chong frowned in thought. Was that Lunatic Guan's name? Guan Ling? Ye Chong seemed to remember something like that. The man who had taught to skeleton carving skills, Old Ge,

probably mentioned that to him before. The memory was from long ago, but Ye Chong with his vivid memory could recall it. Lunatic Guan this, Lunatic Guan that. That was how he had thought of her for so long, and he had forgotten her real name instead.

Ye Chong nodded. "Yes." He was, however, watching Guan Zhengyuan's neck. There hung a familiar looking Red Liqueur.

"How is Ling doing now?" Guan Zhengyuan asked anxiously.

"Dead," Ye Chong answered factually. Lunatic Guan had asked Zhu Ling to find him, but she herself did not make an appearance. Zhu Ling's expression was also telling.

"What?" Guan Zhengyuan was surprised, and his face contorted in pain, his voice trembling from shock.

Ye Chong watched Guan Zhengyuan quietly, unsure what he should say next. In the end, he stuck to the truth, "She probably died saving Zhu Ling. The probability is about 80 to 90 percent."

"Dead ..." Guan Zhengyuan muttered to himself. He seemed lost. His eyes dimmed into a lifeless glow, and he seemed to have grown much older the next second.

Ye Chong did not know what to say. He had always lacked the skills in handling situations like this. More precisely speaking, he was completely clueless about what to do.

Guan Zhengyuan lifted his head abruptly and asked with a hoarse voice, "Zhu Ling? Who is this Zhu Ling you spoke of? Why would Ling go and rescue her?"

"Zhu Ling is her sister."

"What? Sister?" Guan Zhengyuan's hands reached for Ye Chong, his lifeless expression suddenly brought to life again.

Ye Chong sidestepped him easily.

"Ling found our sister ... Ling found our sister ..." Guan

Zhengyuan looked like he was losing it, and Ye Chong thought of giving him a moment to gather himself.

Fortunately, as head of the family, Guan Zhengyuan was able to resume his calmness quickly. He looked at Ye Chong with determined eyes and asked, "And my sister? Where is she?"

Ye Chong answered plainly, "We got separated."

"Separated?" Guan Zhengyuan grew anxious again, and asked, "Where?" He looked just about ready to start the search right away.

"The Red Sea."

The name of the place was unfamiliar, but he still ordered a tribe member in and quietly gave a few orders. After listening to his orders, the subordinate looked at Ye Chong with disbelief, and quickly left the room.

Guan Zhengyuan asked more questions about other things, and Ye Chong answered them all truthfully. When he heard that Guan Ling had passed on all her knowledge to Ye Chong, Guan Zhengyuan was positively overjoyed.

He spoke to the tribe member outside his room, "Bring Jin here."

He then turned back to Ye Chong and said, "Jin is my daughter, and the most capable alchemist in the Guan Family." He looked proud of his daughter. However, he added regretfully, "Compared to Ling in the past, however, she still has a lot to catch up."

Just then, Ye Chong heard a girl's voice from outside said, "Dad, you called for me?"

"Yes, come in," Guan Zhengyuan replied.

A young woman came in through the door. She was about 12 to 14 years old, with a height of about 140 to 150 centimeters. She looked fragile and pale, perhaps due to the lack of sunlight outdoors. Her long hair reached her shoulders, and her eyes glowed with life. Ye Chong studied this young lady called Jin.

"Jin, this is Brother Zhu Feng, a student of your aunt. You will learn from Brother Zhu Feng from now on, understood?" Guan Zhengyuan said sternly.

Guan Jin acknowledged obediently, then addressed her Brother Zhu Feng sweetly. Ye Chong still looked like his usual cold self, but he nodded to her as greeting.

Guan Zhengyuan was satisfied with his daughter's behavior, and smiled gently to her. "Alright, bring Brother Zhu Feng to his room to rest. He must be tired. Ah, and don't forget about our meal time."

Guan Jin acceded.

"This way please, Brother Zhu Feng. Mind the steps." Guan Jin sounded melodic and airy. If Shang were here, he would definitely be swept away. However, Ye Chong obviously was immune to it. Even Feng Su's bewitching voice could not move him, much less the voice of the inexperienced Guan Jin.

Guan Jin quickly noticed that her usually effective measures were not working on Ye Chong. She decided to switch tactics, and said, "Brother Zhu Feng, it's still too early for our next meal. Why don't we visit the alchemy laboratory?"

Chapter 411: Ye Chong's the teacher again!

Guan Jin was the most carefully fostered member in Guan family, that she had her own laboratory, and freedom to research on whichever branch of the alchemy. Not even her father, the leader of the family could have a word on her preferences.

The room was filled with all sorts of utensils. The air was fresher than what one would expect in a laboratory thanks to the superior air ventilation. This was the first professional laboratory Ye Chong witnessed in the free space zone. He was not familiar with most of the apparatuses there. He recognized a few since he had seen them in Lunatic Guan's encyclopedia entries before. Well, he was not a novice and he could guess the functions of these foreign utensils at one glance.

He did enter the place however, as he had perceived 8 spots of threats while he stood by the entrance. Speaking of entrance, there were three of them.

The lady seemed to be rather skillful at handling these reagents. The anesthetic she added remained at the specified area ever since. Spreading of fluid did not occur - now that was not something any alchemist could do.

Knowing that it was an anesthetic, Ye Chong let down his guard, since the smoke pearl in his possession was the counter to all hallucinogens and anesthetics. So he walked into the laboratory as usual, and as he had expected, he was unaffected by the reagent.

Guan Jin's cherry lips slightly opened in disbelief upon seeing Ye Chong walking in nonchalantly. She did not expect the little mischief she created would cause any visible trouble to Brother Zhu Feng since she only wanted to see his countermeasure for this, she was eager to verify the frightening rumor about him after all. But then ... he did nothing! Literally nothing!

Guan Jin's passion in her gaze intensified.

Ye Chong did not notice Guan Jin's passion stare however, as he had been distracted by these strange utensils on the table. Certainly the alchemy system was different between one galaxy to another. From the perspective of apparatuses, the 5 major galaxies had an upper hand since they had the avant-garde technologies after all. The precision of analyzing mechanism and processor were far more superior than those in the free space zone. When it came to historical background however, the position changed. No way the studies of alchemy in 5 major galaxies could compete with those of free space zone. Any alchemy aristocrat could easily have history of over a few centuries.

Regarding the learning difficulty, the system of free space zone outweighed the one in 5 major galaxies. The 5 major galaxies did analysis at best, with the aid of technologies but alchemists in free space zone could rely none other than their own senses.

Based on Lunatic Guan's records in her chip, she seemed to have thoroughly understood and absorbed the system of 5 major galaxies. The later part of her research was indistinguishable of its system. She probably had combined both systems at one point. Ye Chong could not help but to marvel at Lunatic Guan's insane luck. She was born in free space zone and was raised at May Night's Ridge, the heavenly place of alchemy, while being able to learn about the alchemy system in the 5 major galaxies. With all these he strongly believed no one else in this world could have surpassed her.

Ye Chong noticed that one flask on the table.

"Are you trying to improvise the Bilayered Liquid Tempering Technique?" asked Ye Chong as he pointed at the utensils near Guan Jin.

"Mhm...", she blushed, as she bit her lips, "I wanted to try... since father told me that this was aunt's masterpiece in the past. She always wanted to improvise it. So I would like to try... see if I could make a little improvement... just a little would've been great..." It

was not sentiments that filled her voice, it was pure embarrassment. She should not have brought Brother Zhu Feng to the lab, now everyone in the ridge would know she wanted to "improvise" her aunt's technique and she would become a laughing stock for she overestimated herself.

Ye Chong lowered his back and observed these used utensils carefully. He was pretty surprised of the progress. The little girl failed at this attempt, but she was heading to the right way. As expected, this girl was talented after all. Ye Chong could not imagine a girl could have such understanding on alchemy even before adolescence.

Does Guan family only give birth to geniuses?

Shouted Ye Chong in his mind.

"You are right at this." He decided to offer some advice, "But you did a few parts wrong. The tempering technique basically achieves extraction by splitting the liquid membranes, and your hypothesis should revolve about this core concept. The shape, the membrane, remember."

Guan Jin's brows furrowed as she pondered. "I got it!" Then she shouted while jumping, "I know what you mean! I finally got it!" And she excitingly rushed to her table and began mixing the reagent again. She was very attentive on her research, her hands moved gracefully as she added more things to the mixture, as if Ye Chong was not there.

Ye Chong was impressed since he always had a soft spot for a diligent researcher. Well, he was one too and he believed only those who diligently researched would hit the top of their field.

Ye Chong did not say a thing as he started strolling in this laboratory.

The aristocrat was sure something. The lab contained a rich collection of reagents, which teased Ye Chong's curiosity deeply,

that he finally jumped into action and started producing his own reagent too.

The apparatuses in the lab were fairly unique. He knew how to use them but he lacked the actual experience, thus the clumsy movement of his hands. He enjoyed the process of exploration nevertheless.

It took him a moment to grow familiar with the apparatuses. He breathed in relief as he placed one flask down, that was when a pair of watery eyes appeared before him.

Guan Jin was staring at this strange brother of hers. She found him peculiar as he should be a very experienced alchemist, yet he was clearly unfamiliar with most of the apparatuses in the lab.

Weird.

This student of her aunt was filled with mysteries...

"Did it work?" asked Ye Chong, lifting his head.

"Yes! Yes! Indeed it worked!" Guan Jin smiled brightly, as if her dream came true.

Ye Chong responded with a nod. He wanted to tell her something but he did not.

The improvised technique was not the ultimate. It was not final, simply because Lunatic Guan had never stopped improvising the technique ever since. The attempt Guan Jin did this time was merely the first version. Ye Chong zipped his mouth not because of sympathy or confidentiality, but the fact that the later versions would require high-end machines. So it would be pointless to tell her.

"I can't believe it!" said Guan Jin proudly, biting her finger, "I can actually improvise my aunt's technique!" Her eyes were filled with blazing passion.

"It's meal time!" And someone came shouting.

... (At the dining table) ...

It was a feast on the dining table as Ye Chong chomped vigorously. "So today, Brother Zhu Feng taught me on improvising the bilayered technique..." Reported Guan Jin to Guan Zhengyuan, and the others gave a friendlier stare at Ye Chong.

Ye Chong's chopsticks danced, the bowl was tingling yet his eyes remained low.

The tale of "Little Alchemist, Big Creation" had spread throughout the family rapidly. Ye Chong noticed it because of how courteous everyone acted towards him in the house.

Well, he had gotten used to such treatment back when he taught the Sangs on crafting. He still was a little uneasy however so he spent most time in the lab. There would always be a few young men standing by his side. Guan Jin on the other hand would be her pretty assistant.

Ye Chong was rather puzzled by this. Lunatic Guan's microchip had been kept inside his bag. And the bag was not with him at the moment. He could have just passed the chip to Guan family but he could not. There were too many contents in the chip, several centuries would have easily passed if he had to write everything out from his memory.

He would not be able to accept such fate. But which one to write then? Which would be able to convince the family to let him go?

The worst part was, Lunatic Guan's later research was beyond the family's understanding since her research had incorporated techniques from both systems of the galaxies. It was so complicated that even Guan Jin was showing that incomprehensibility towards his writings, eventually Ye Chong only could explain from the most fundamental to at least make sense in his teaching.

Well, that had earned more respects from the family however.

Little Ye Chong knew that, the ultimate factor to Guan family's resurrection was not the refined theories and techniques created by Lunatic Guan, but those basic approaches from the 5 major galaxies.

The ridge was chaotic these few days, as the generations fought each other. It was becoming more common to see different forces coming to challenge the family, that mortality increased drastically.

But Guan family was at peace. Nothing happened ever since Ye Chong came.

But visionary elderlies like Guan Zhengyuan knew conflict would one day arrive and, "The leader would like Mr. Zhu Feng to move to the entrance. Someone had come for a challenge."

That was when Ye Chong was demonstrating the molecular qualitative approach in class.

Chapter 412: The Strange Path

Challenging an entire family on something is absolutely not a simple task. It requires technique and a savage bravery to shoulder the risk. Unless in a law's film, you probably would never see a nobody challenging a prestigious family out of nowhere. So it is only natural to see a well-known person challenging someone else's home.

Guan Zhengyuan was at the porch. He could not help but to take a deep breath upon seeing the crowd. The Shi family came for real, with an army of 35 experts which probably equalled to one-third of the entire family. And Guan Zhengyuan could perceive the diabolic cunning nature in their eyes. He might not be the best alchemist but he was at least experienced to know that the entire family of his would likely be unable to handle such intrusion.

Whatever that is going to happen, happens. Sighed Guan Zhengyuan in his mind. Looks like he could only rely on Ling's students now...

Guan family would regain its esteem and rise again, if they won that is. If they lost, it would be a news in the ridge that would lure all other new families who coveted the single slot of residence at the heaven of alchemy. When that happened, Guan family would perish.

That was when Ye Chong exited the porch with the noises crowding behind him.

Countless stares rested upon him. There were respects, envies, doubts and confusions...

So that is the alchemist who took a shortcut back to the ridge? The crowd began rustling again. It was the first time for the majority to see such a young alchemist.

Ye Chong's arrival had increased the intensity of the place. Ye

Chong was fairly calm but a few of the crowd had already their hands wetted. He was leading the group of young apprentices of Guan family, looking fearless and excited. They were anticipating Teacher Zhu Feng's performance, for he was so great in his teaching that they felt the need to have a cult for him. So to those challengers who blindly came for our family, are you ready to have your butt kicked?

Ye Chong was pretty aware of the situation. At this point he probably would be the only person to take the challenge, since he knew the apprentices of Guan family were matchless against the foes in front of them. He did teach them a few new tricks but it surely would take some time for them to master those skills.

Simply, no way they would win against the challengers.

He was the only hope, he thought as he helplessly walked towards Guan Zhengyuan.

"If it wasn't for my Zhufeng," said Guan Zhengyuan with a bright smile, as if liberated from the pressure exerted by the Shi family.

"Mhm," nodded Ye Chong. The next question however came so unexpectedly that almost everyone tripped their steps, "So... how do people do this 'challenge' thing usually? Is it a contest?" That was a good... question...

"Haha..." Laughed Guan Zhengyuan joyfully, "Nothing much. Just some troublemakers wanting some troubles at our porch."

"I see," Ye Chong nodded. The word "troublemakers" made perfect sense. And suddenly he had a thought - if it was Lunatic Guan, how would she handle these troublemakers? Ye Chong knew Lunatic Guan well, in most cases, she would annihilate the entire army and take a sprint to Shi family's home for another massacre.

"Zhu Feng, please do not hesitate, you could do whatever you want with them. Even if you want to shatter the ground, be my guest." Guan Zhengyuan's tone was calm, frigidly calm, the typical

tone one would use when mentioning the public enemy. His words were crudely translated as - all you can smash.

"Whatever I want?" Ye Chong's face was filled with the you-sure confusion.

Guan Zhengyuan looked at the army of Shi family, smiled, "Yes, whatever you want."

And Ye Chong vanished, a faint voice rang, "Alright."

There Ye Chong was figuring out a strategy to finish this fight in shortest time possible.

It would still be the classic brawling. Picking the right strategy suiting to the situation is vital to the battle, that was the lesson he learned from all battles he had experienced. So, brawling it is.

He had activated the techniques of September Lan style as his assassination went. He did not have his wooden spear with him but being barehanded actually made him better.

The fox joining the hares in the pen - that would be the analogical summary of what happened next.

The alchemists were utterly unprepared towards Ye Chong's assassination. As known an alchemist was just fragile in front of a martial arts practitioner. They could not react to his overwhelming speed in time. They could not even move a muscle when facing this Jie expert.

Ye Chong zapped through the crowd, with his afterimages stamped on every corner.

Crack... Crack... Klink... Crack...

Those were the sound of throats breaking.

It felt like autumn all over again, when the nuts cracked.

The formation of Shi family army was dense to begin with. And Ye Chong was simply talented at crowd control. They were fighting a losing fight anyway since their flasks contained a

massive poison which could have hurt their allies if simply thrown.

The slaughterhouse ran smoothly.

The wails continued.

22 seconds lapsed.

Corpses were all over the ground. Dents could be found over the throats. Ye Chong was expressionless as he stood back.

It was a total massacre.

Thought the spectators in fear.

Nobody would have expected this young alchemist being also a martial arts practitioner, a brutal one too. He was indifferent, satanically indifferent that he did not even bother to have another look at the bodies on the ground.

The apprentices would probably be having nightmare tonight. Guan Jin's eyes went wide like saucer, her face was pale as in disbelief she looked at the kind, inquisitive Brother Zhu Ling being at the bloody pool.

God of Slaughter...

Thought Guan Zhengyuan, feeling his heart just skipped a beat. Somehow the title appeared in his mind.

People were expecting a battle in alchemy but this young man simply finished everybody without using a single flask, that was something new in the ridge. No one had done this before. May Night's Ridge was a residence filled with alchemists, there was no practitioner before.

Finishing challengers with brutal force... would this count as victory...? There were debates regarding Guan family's success since the ridge committee never said one would be allowed to take on challenges only with alchemy.

There was one thing that did not require debates however - Guan

family was untouchable and should never be touched! Ever since that incident, no one had come to their porch despite all the bloodshed at other families.

Ye Chong had demonstrated the cruelty of war to the people. The brutal gruesome side of the war too. They had never seen a hand-on-hand before and Ye Chong had shown them. People were stunned and became very convinced that Ye Chong would be a true horror because of the fact he knew both alchemist and martial arts.

Shi family had suffered a great loss this time. One-third of the family's force got all wiped out in less than a minute. These master-alchemists-to-be were not even able to last till the end.

The debate went on as people argued, "What's wrong of using martial arts when taking on challenges anyway?"

Guan family remained low on this, as they had their gates tightly shut and forbade everyone from leaving the house.

The incident had also affected the committee, that Guan family was assigned with the most resources this year. Guan Zhengyuan was very delighted since that only signified the elevated status of his family in the ridge.

5 days later, Guan family had also submitted a report on possible improvements that could be made on bilayered liquid tempering technique. That was an earth-shattering discovery. The ridge was shocked again. The technique was an invention by Guan Ling and was recognized as the top recent invention years ago. Attempts on improving the technique had been ongoing ever since, but nobody had succeeded so far. And they actually submitted a report on it?

People once doubted the standard of that mysterious boy till they saw the report. They were totally convinced. On the cover page the author might be "Guan Jin", the daughter of the family, but everybody could feel the contribution of that someone between the lines.

It looked like Guan family was hopeful of resurrection, while the other families were bitter at it.

Why can't it be our family that gets a talent out of nowhere?

Chapter 413: Training

It did not take long for Ye Chong to notice the fear in everyone's eyes upon seeing him. Seeing them backing down all the time was puzzling at first but he understood the cause very soon after. May Night's Ridge could be a mysterious place of wondrous alchemy to the people outside. The residents in the ridge might possibly be the strongest alchemist he could find anywhere else, but they eventually were just a bunch of researchers isolated from the hustle and bustle of the outside world, that they had never once witnessed the bloodshed of an actual war. In Ye Chong's eyes, they were just weak.

"Brother Zhu Feng, I have a proposition," said Guan Jin, seeing nobody around. She had spent most time with Ye Chong so she could say she knew Ye Chong the best. No doubt Ye Chong was an extremely dangerous figure but somehow she felt a kind of security being with him. Brother Zhu Feng would be a tamed, friendly animal as long as he was never enraged. Naturally he was neither odd-tempered nor hot-tempered, after all.

"What is it?" Ye Chong could definitely feel her talents in alchemy, she might be the brightest student in Guan family. Sadly he did not have the microchip with him. He could have taught her all the essentials with it.

For example, the Guan's automatic analysis mechanism had always been a mystery to Ye Chong regarding the exact concept that made it work in the first place. To him, the mechanism probably was the most valuable and brilliant invention in the chip, as it was the solid proof of Lunatic Guan's vast knowledge of alchemy.

Guan Jin was a born alchemist. Ye Chong believed her future would still be bright even without the aid of the mechanism. Strangely the little girl showed no fear towards him, while being ever-mischievous, a little perplexing to be honest. She was the

exact opposite to the other apprentices who were loyal and modest in the family. Well, perhaps it was her personality that she always was able to create surprises in alchemy.

"Brother Zhu Feng...", her watery eyes blinked in the harmless innocence, "why don't you go challenge somebody too?"

"Challenge who?" He took a look at the little girl biting her index finger.

"Yes! Yes! Challenge!" shouted Guan Jin cheerfully. "It doesn't feel good to always get challenged by people. Brother Zhu Feng it would be better if we go and hit on somebody else instead! Let's keep hitting them till they never wanted to hit on us anymore!" said Guan Jin, in the most innocent expression possible. That was quite a contrast.

Somehow Ye Chong was reminded of Lunatic Guan. They were still from the same family after all. The same brutal honesty, the same brutal inquisitiveness. Ye Chong seriously could imagine Lunatic Guan flipping out then crashing Shi family's home right away, and she would not stop till the entire building turned into debris.

Sentiments aside, Ye Chong was processing Guan Jin's request.

Does Guan Jin's proposition make sense?

Pretty much. Concluded he. It would be far better to initiator instead of a receiver in wars. The odds would be likelier on their side.

"Can I assassinate?" It would be simple if Ye Chong was allowed to assassinate. He already had an impeccable plan in his mind - he would pilot Moon King at a dark, cold night and make his way to Shi family, then he would raze the entire building to the ground, everything would be accomplished in few seconds of pure silence. It would be smooth and-

"Nah...", shook Guan Jin, "I don't think so." Guan Jin seemed

intrigued by his plan at first but luck was not doing them a favor, "The committee had just set up a new rule days ago. Challengers are not allowed to use strategies other than alchemy, or the committee would be stepping in. It is no good for you to raise your fist, since only you know how to use your fist in this ridge. If a bleeding war happened and no flask was thrown, our family would be taking all the blame. Not good, bad plan." Obviously that new rule was a countermeasure for a monstrous fighter like Ye Chong.

Guan Jin seemed to be a fairly good strategist at her age, like too good, that people would have given her the strangest stare if they heard her explanation. But Ye Chong had already recognized her talents even in wars.

Well, challenging other family in light was something pretty laborious to Ye Chong, since that would be just another war of territory while exposing all his cards at once. He never fancied everything being put under the spotlight, that was simply dangerous.

Ye Chong did not mind helping the family out on some chores, since Lunatic Guan was his teacher, but that did not translate as he was willing to do everything. His own security was still the top priority.

"Not interested," shook Ye Chong, as he declined Guan Jin's offer.

"H-how could you...", tears welled up in her eyes, "How could you simply reject me so? Oh Brother Zhu Feng, how could you say no even to a cute girl with a simple request like me?" she said pitifully, with her shaking voice. She was fairly confident in her trick, since even her father would forgive her whenever she put that face on.

Well, she was facing the wrong foe today. Ye Chong was unaffected by her weeping expression.

"If you don't mind, I could teach you a trick or two on combats," said Ye Chong, which was a surprising suggestion to Guan Jin.

"You want to teach me on combats?" Guan Jin was bewildered.

That was probably the moment Ye Chong regretted his generosity the most. He intended to teach only Guan Jin at first, who knows Guan Zhengyuan got informed of this and became excited, "All the apprentices, join your teacher now!" Then Ye Chong got an additional 30 students in his fighting class.

Well, Ye Chong did not show resistance towards the unexpected turn of event however. He knew that students could benefit from a larger group since they could have partners for practical combats which would be the best method to improve their skills.

The Guan apprentices were certainly excited but they behaved themselves in front of Ye Chong, since this teacher was also that murderer who finished over 30 challengers in less than a minute.

Ye Chong took a careful look at bodies of his students. He did not seem very pleased.

"From today onwards, you will be learning martial arts," said Ye Chong concisely on the first class, to the hell.

Speed is the key term in winning an alchemy war. The shorter time the better, be it the time taken for making the potion, or the time needed before the effects of the potion activate. In a place like May Night's Ridge, there were countless poison that could activate in 0.1 second. One might ask why the rush, but it was always that 0.1 second which determined the outcome of the war. Thus Ye Chong first trained them to create the deadly poison the quickest possible. The formula he chose was simple yet very effective.

Yup, it all relied on the speed of their hands again, just like how Ye Chong almost broke his hands during Mu's special training course in the past.

To encourage these students, "Look," he decided to demonstrate his own speed, "If you work hard enough, you could be like me too." Said he after executing an intense acrobatic performance

with his hands.

"Wow..." The kids were simply amazed.

Well that was not Ye Chong's maximum speed. A real quick hand-movement would be one that lost its silhouette. Certainly that would be very helpful in wars but people could learn nothing if Ye Chong demonstrated that instead.

The passion in students did not last the moment the mundane training began. They never failed to end up looking muddy, swollen and sweaty. Contrary to Ye Chong's expectation, no one had put up their white flag just yet, not even Guan Jin the blooming princess.

Other than physical training, they also had research training to do. They were required to find out the optimized application of offensive reagents. And that was when practical came in handy. To be frank, a war between alchemists was still fatal even as a practice. Accidents still happened occasionally under supervision of few senior family members.

Everyone looked calm nevertheless. And Ye Chong realized how the competition between families could be cruel at the ridge.

He started estimating the time he had to spend there. Well, he did not intend a permanent residence there. He came just because of Lunatic Guans request and it already felt like the time to go. This was not a good place for permanent resident after all.

The young apprentices learned rapidly. They still needed more time to further improvise their alchemy training but they were already given the best foundation. Under these intensive trainings, it would only be a matter of time till a horrendous army was born and perhaps nobody at the ridge could have a chance against them.

Too bad Ye Chong would be leaving soon and none of the afterstory would have anything to do with him.

But wait, there was one last thing to do. He had to examine his

students after the training.

He decided to test them with an actual war. They would be heading to Shi family to initiate a challenge. Of course, the one knocking on Shi family's door would never be him. That would be a job for Guan's apprentices.

Chapter 414: An Awesome Strike

The Ridge Council, the committee of the ridge, determined almost everything in May Night's Ridge. Its headquarter was known as the Ridge Council House and had been the solemn, unshakable establishment in the heart of all residents in the ridge for it had been rumored that the House had existed along with the Ridge.

It was a rather ancient building, with stone walls covered in thick mosses, tangling scented vines over the roof and every corner. One would hear the chimes coming from the roof whenever the breeze came by. The corridor was made out of woods, that each step creating gentle squeaks. The handles of the corridor were unadorned and classy.

It was such a fascinating place that it had become an ultimate goal to every resident in the Ridge, that one day they would be able to step into the House and present their own findings.

Ever since the Ridge was founded, the House had been in charge of evaluating all families' development of alchemy studies, and certainly every single project or invention would require approval from the House itself. The committee was a wise one that would generously reward talents in the ridge. Not only these contributing researchers would receive helps on finance and materials, they would also gain access to the House's database, the reference room which contained all records, the unknown dark secrets of every other branch starting from the establishment of the Ridge. Guan Ling the very genius surely had tasted this nectar of knowledge before, the precious formulas of other branches in microchip were originated here as well.

And today, the first meeting of the year would commence. This time with the goal of assessing the report on critical temperature control submitted by Guan family.

The head of the council was an wizened old man in his late seventies. His expression was almost imperceivable with layers of wrinkles. His eyes were looking muddy, his hair was messy. His apparel was torn, discolored and tainted.

Guan Zhengyuan's eyes were bright the moment he spotted the old man, as hurriedly he led his few men there.

"Just a moment please, leader."

The old man held his steps upon call. He chuckled as he turned to Guan Zhengyuan and waited him ahead, "If it wasn't Zhengyuan."

"Are you well all these while?" said Guan Zhengyuan with a bow. The apprentices bowed as well.

"I am in my seventies. I can't do very well, but not really bad either. I must say, Zhengyuan, brilliant job this time. The first report for the meeting this year... happened to be from your family I reckoned? It is certainly unexpected."

"It's nothing really. All thanks to Zhu Feng and Yan. You know how I do in alchemy, I can't really help much," said Guan Zhengyuan honestly, with modesty of a child.

"Oh, Yan? You meant the one who did the report this time? Guan Yan was it? Who is that?" muttered the old man as he glanced at the report in his hand.

"That's Yan," Guan Zhengyuan quickly grabbed the shrinking violet at his back. "Come, have a word with our chairperson."

"Greetings...", mumbled the young man.

"Hello to you too. Alright, alright, leave the gentleman alone, Zhengyuan, you're frightening the rabbit," chuckled the old man again, with a loving look at Yan.

His murky eyes then went upon Ye Chong, "So this must be Ling's student... Zhu Feng... was it?" Well, Ye Chong was still otherworldly by nature, as he exuded simply a different kind of

aura than the other Guans. It was not strange that the old man would recognize him right away.

"Zhu Feng, please come and have a word too," said Guan Zhengyuan sincerely.

"Zhu Feng has met the head right here," said Ye Chong formally, the traditional Guan style greetings, with a bow.

"Fair enough. You did well after you got back home. You certainly did not disappoint your teacher. You know I've been by Ling's side since she was very young. She's intelligence, also hardworking. Please keep up the good work and let the name of your teacher last in harmony," lectured the elderly.

Although Ye Chong couldn't really recall anything Lunatic Guan was expecting of him, he could tell the kindness in the words of the old man. "Understood," said Ye Chong. The conciseness did not seem to please Guan Zhengyuan, even though the old man seemed to like it very much.

"Alright, it's time to go. The meeting is starting soon. Get prepared, Yan, well, don't panic, just present whatever you know," exhorted the old man.

This was the first annual meeting this year. Every member of the House had attended promptly, along with representatives from all 14 families who were highly interested in the latest creation of the new celeb, Guan family.

Guan Yan's shaking eyes shifted upon every little pair of gazes below. His breathing hastened, his cheeks were red and he could almost hear his heart thumping. He needed water...

It had been a dream for him to stand there and expound his findings but he never really expected the day to come, this fast...

He tried pinching his face, wondering if it was a dream.

"Guan Yan." And he heard his name announced, it would be time for him to speak up.

His legs were melting as if, his head was buzzing for no reason. He was searching for that one familiar face in the hall, through every corner and stopped at last.

Mr. Zhu Feng was there, standing at the corner silently. He looked calm. No encouragement, no lecture, no slam and clap to wake him from his daydreaming. Somehow, Guan Yan had calmed down.

Shi Wuwei's face was grim as he watched Guan Yan presenting relaxingly. He was not in a good mood to be honest. Shi Mingbei next to him was looking at Ye Chong too. Their expressions were indescribable.

Technically, every representative of other families looked with an indescribable expression as well. They never expected such a heavy plot twist, such a comeback from a banishing family. Their stares enviously were projected at Guan Zhengyuan. And everybody knew who the real culprit of this mutation was, it was no one other than that indifferent young man at the corner.

Looking at Guan Yan, Ye Chong was feeling odd too. At first he presumed Guan Jin would be the talent who would discover a breakthrough the first. But fate was strange and capricious, eventually it turned out to be Guan Yan the silent and ordinary one who made the breakthrough.

The hall was silent, with Guan Yan's innocent voice resounded in the space. The audience was listening to him attentively, while being unaware of the horrible happening out there.

...(at the outside)...

Guan Jin was biting her finger as she proudly looked at the porch of Shi family, where large pile of bodies laid. The survivors of the family were looking frightful.

"What? Nobody wants a challenge?" asked Guan Jin innocently as she lifted her tiny chin, leading a row of young Guan

apprentices.

10 points to Guan family.

0 to Shi.

It was a shocking figure. Guan Jin led 30 trained apprentices to hit on Shi family, as an mini examination for the trainees while being also a form of demonstration to the families outside.

Of all timings! Thought Shi family in fear. They were truly unlucky today. Shi Wuwei, the leader of the family had already brought the adepts to the House, while the other adepts had headed out for a mission a while ago.

No one would have expected being raided when the family was at the weakest.

The remaining members did not take the challengers seriously at first, since... well those were just a bunch of primary schoolers... with the leader being a 12-year-old girl.

They thought they could kick these children back to kindergarten while receiving compliments from the leader, but things just changed.

Nothing flashy, nothing fancy, the children were simply fast. And it was such insane speed that destroyed everything the Shi's knew about battles, as they started to realize how unnecessarily flashy their moves were. Combination of potions? That did not matter. The appropriate countermeasure for the little attacks? That never existed. The chance of fighting back? Wait, they could fight back?

The army of children felt like the chivalrous swordsmen whose strikes landed rapidly. The attack had been done before the foe even drew the sword.

"Teehee~ Good bye Shi family!"

Guan Jin led the army away in bright smile of victory.

On that day, two things happened. And every family held their flasks. The two incidents seemed unrelated at first, till they involved Guan family. The House meeting, the Shi massacre.

It was a sign, a sign of Guan's resurrection, resuscitation of hope.

Of course the family raised again as they stepped on the bodies of Shi's. The Shi family had weakened dramatically. It had been rumored that Shi Wuwei fainted after coughing a splash of blood upon returning home.

The raise of Guan family actually created a brief peace period in the ridge.

People were anticipating the next war, between Guan family and Shi family. IT would be a never-before-seen major war between two large families, and the outcome of this war would affect the balance of forces between the old and new generations in the ridge.

It was a brewing storm.

Chapter 415: Encounter

Right when everyone anticipated the next massacre to happen, when people were expecting that mysterious boy from Guan family to jump into action again, Ye Chong was already prepared to leave the place.

Guan family had once again risen. They might have sunken for ages, however they were still a family from the ancient. They had the potential from the very beginning, They only lacked a little spark to light up the fire.

Ye Chong strongly believed that Guan family was practically unshakable now, not even Shi family could touch them. And possibly the family would grow stronger, pulling distance with other families over the time. Guan family had not only an army of fighting alchemist, but also a skillful alchemy researcher like Guan Yan. Ye Chong had given the sparks they needed, Ye Chong had unlocked a new gate for their future, well it might be just a small gap at the moment, but they were growing fast.

They remained fearless even if there were challengers at the doorstep now. Ye Chong reckoned Guan family would continue the hand speed training after the success this time. Guan Jin the talented would surely be a great force for the family in future.

But well, it was time to leave. To be honest, Ye Chong had no idea why he must leave but the feeling was strong in him.

He took one last glance at Guan's residence below. "Phew..." At least he had another job done. He gave a few taps and the Moon King left the ridge silently like a phantom.

In the midst of night silence, a few red spots were displayed on the projection.

Something was there!

Ye Chong turned on the detection system immediately.

Zoom in!

Those were 7 mechs, heading towards him in a standard formation!

Ye Chong could identify the leading mech, while the rest... he had never seen the 6 models before. But he knew those mechs belonged to Xi Feng tribe.

The leading mech was Phoenix Lord. Ye Chong had smashed one before, though a close fight it was. And the experience of that battle had left deep impression in him. Based on a typical Xi Feng lineup, the other 6 mechs should be a rank lower than the Phoenix Lord.

The Phoenix Lord mech had a rather stunning appearance thanks to its giant pair of green wings. The other mechs also had similarly plated the outer layer with dark green, thus the invisibility at night.

Ye Chong could hear his head buzzing...

He had just encountered 7 mechs. If he was able to pick his opponent, he would choose Xi Feng tribe during an one-on-one without hesitation. However, Xi Feng tribe would be the worst opponent choice in a group fight, since it had been widely known that the Xi Feng tribe had the most impeccably cooperative trained army among the 3 aristocrats. They were feeble as singled out, but they were almost indestructible in a group.

Well, since Ye Chong was the protagonist of this novel, in order to survive, he had no other choice but to run.

Unfortunately, it was too late for him to make an escape as the 7 mechs had charged towards Moon King in a perfect curve formation.

A handful of beams had formed into a giant web netting Moon King.

Ye Chong swung his handle to dodge. To fight against Xi Feng

tribe's mechs, you got to make the move first, anything later would be solely regarded as too late.

The Moon King's course remained unpredictable while doing most beams fired by the foes. Moon King managed to block the two beams with its shield, but it felt like a close shave to Ye Chong since he always found difficulty with ranged attacks. Assuming the foe had a godly sniper like Mu, it probably would only take a trigger to finish him off.

Ye Chong did not stop his fingers. A small break would have costed his life. Non-orderly Wavy Leap, the first fancy move he had mastered, came into his aid again. Certainly the technique had matured tremendously as the curves had a wider tangent, the velocity was unforeseeably faster.

The dark Moon King moved like a phantom, as shrouded by the night, dodging the beams.

The 7 mechs maintained their flawless formation as they zoomed behind.

Ye Chong could not find the right timing to attack.

There was a prairie not too far away from Line Shaft City.

Feng Su took a look at the sky.

Those are... those are my people!

She shouted in her mind.

They must be here for me!

She thought as she looked at the barbarians, who seemed to have noticed her disdainful stare, that she immediately withdrew her stare out of fear.

Tackan and these barbarians... Feng Su cursed.

She had been spending the days like a caged canary, as she was being watched the whole time. There was not a moment where she could deploy her mech and run. Not only that, she was forced to

conduct all kinds of training and engage in all sorts of battles. They were real barbarians for they never thought of showing mercy towards a girl like her.

I think my Jie expert training would've been easier than this.

If this isn't hell...

She would receive the stare of untamed wrath whenever she lifted her steps beyond the boundary, that she believed she would be immediately slaughtered if she ever ran.

"Hmmmmm... weird...," muttered Liu Sheng as he looked upon the sky, "I have never seen such meteor shower before..."

"So what? It's your turn to train her," said Sisko impatiently.

"Again?" Liu Sheng flinched and shrugged at Feng Su. "Well, you have to work hard lassie. You don't get to train with me everyday."

Feng Su bit her lips. The veil on her face had already been shredded into a million pieces during her battle. Well, at least these barbarians seemed uninterested of her presence.

But they were lunatics! They were simply maniac! They had some really ridiculous thoughts on combats, that she cannot comprehend! They never had breaks between dummy and fight practice. It was terrifying to Feng Su to perform such sadistic training every single day! Moreover, those were not ordinary fight practices, as they fought with their lives! The first time she saw their "demonstration" she thought these barbarians just had issues with each other and wanted to resolve with murder!

Her pretty face was now tanned. Her smooth hair was puffy and stuck with grasses. She was no longer that seductive singer before. But she made it here, although she was sweating, occasionally bleeding, she made it with maximum efforts and her lips bitten.

Over the days Feng Su could feel the changing attitude among the group, during which occasionally she would see the slight admiration in their eyes.

Despite all the chaotic training, Feng Su did improve greatly under immense stress. Her physique had elevated to a whole new level. She was frail, even as a Jie expert before and that frailty was more apparent when she fought with these barbarians. She could now tie with any of these men, well, given that the fight did not last longer than 15 minutes, since she was still limited by her stamina.

During the process, Feng Su once given up the idea of running away. The attacks from these barbarians were uncertain, that she would never last more than 5 minutes if she did not invest 100% of her efforts. She could lose since they showed zero tolerance towards a lagger.

Well, her time to run had come. She was right. The 7 mechs came for her indeed.

Feng Su was expected to arrive Dankwood and take over the admiration works there a long time ago, but the tribe had never received any reports since then. So they were pretty positive that Feng Su had bumped into something. The authority decided to send off all the forces to look for her.

The plot twist was... they encountered Ye Chong. Ye Chong's mech, which was presumably an advanced model of Ye family, and that was more than enough to cause alert in the searching team. They did not intend to take action at first, till Ye Chong ran away promptly, which convinced them that something fishy was going on. Everything made perfect sense, as only Ye family's Mandate model could smash a Phoenix Lord of the tribe, which was the exact model Feng Su was piloting.

It was a one-on-seven fight, which justified the confidence in the leader of Team Feng Su.

They then arrived by a mountain range, which looked like a resting beast in the dark.

That spelled good news to Ye Chong, as his hands danced upon

the control panel.

The Moon King made a bouncing turn as the body shook slightly to get out of the foes' lock-on. Right when the 7 mechs tried to reposition their crosshairs, Moon King made a high leap and zapped through the mountains.

The chasing mechs did not halt at all, as they reformed into a perfect diagonal, following this Ye model.

The piercing cries of the mechs shattered the silence of the woods, as birds flew away.

Both parties gradually lowered their flight.

That was not a good sign to Team Feng Su, as the leader frowned, knowing that it would be a goner if the foe had run into the woods, "Everyone on your mark, turn to manual aiming, ready to fire on my call."

Their processor had been taking forever to relocate the crosshair on the ever-moving foe. So they got to do it the traditional way.

Well, as expected from a Mandate class...

Complimented the pilot from Team Feng Su.

The model was good enough, but the pilot was greater. Those were some masterly controls he witnessed, with all turns made on the most impeccable timing which managed to disrupt their paces of shooting.

They must not let their prey escape into the forest, as not only it would be more harder, it would be also more dangerous. The foe was a melee model and forest like this was wholly its territory.

A Mandate class pilot must be a melee expert. No explanation required.

The pilot must be.

Frankly speaking, if the foe was not outnumbered, the outcome of the battle would have been the other way round.

"Leader, manual aiming is not possible," stated the man in the communicating channel.

"I know, such a lively prey, livelier than the animal."

"True, he's piloting a Mandate, not some random instant mech at the supermarket after all." They sounded very excited somehow... probably it was the first time they chased a Mandate.

"Switch your mode," the leading pilot instructed. "All units switch your single-targeted aiming to area-aiming. Remain manual."

"Yes, sir." They understood it was not the time to mess around.

"Lock on complete."

"Lock on complete too."

...

"Group firing calibration complete. Ready to fire at once." Heavy breaths were heard in the channel.

"FIRE!" the leading pilot shouted.

Chapter 416: Huang Jiming's Battlelust

Countless thin lasers converged into a point, merging into a single, thick beam that came down from high above. The mountain ranges were illuminated as bright as day by the bright laser beam.

The laser beams were merged together after frequency-phase synchronization, and the result was an extraordinarily powerful laser beam. Now, the beam was so powerful that its cross section was much larger than its individual component beams.

The seven mech pilots looked at the holographic screen with bated breath and eyes wide open. The combined power of the laser beams from seven mechs was enough to destroy even a Mandate class mech. However, this power came at a price with an obvious weakness.

First, the beams must be synchronized perfectly. While this was done, the mechs would not be able to move or evade attacks as freely as before. In the vital seconds of battle, this would endanger the mechs significantly. Secondly, activating all of the beams would deplete energy quickly. One round of shooting would exhaust one third of a mech's energy cell at full capacity.

Experienced mech pilots would know to employ this method only when evasion maneuvers were not necessary, or the result would be death!

The seven mech pilots felt like their blood was boiling with excitement! Terminating a Mandate class mech would bring them not only glory, but also the Tribe Leader's personal commendation. The Tribe had never defeated a Mandate class mech before.

The combined beam attack was complete! They opened their eyes wide open. The next moment would be the most glorious and unforgettable moment in their lives. They must see with their own

eyes the flame that came from the explosion of this Mandate class mech.

The enemy's dead for sure! Up until now, they had never heard of anyone surviving a combined beam attack. A combined beam attack was like a sharp, double edged knife – it was rarely used, but every unsheathing of the blade would end in casualties.

Suddenly, their eyes widened even further! Every one of them wore the same expression of disbelief, as if they had just seen a monster.

The comms channel was dead silent!

How was this possible ... How was this possible?

What were they seeing?

Abruptly, one of the mech pilots broke out of his trance, and moved so quickly to rewind the holographic screen recording it was like he had gone mad. When he started the screen recorder a moment ago, he wanted to record down the moment when the Mandate class mech exploded into pieces as a piece of his most prized memory. However, he never imagined that he had recorded a scene that had to be seen to be believed.

The holographic screen replayed the entire scene faithfully.

Seen from high above, the night sky and the dark mountain ranges formed the background of the scene. A black mech disguised itself in the dark, making it difficult to notice. The black mech never stopped with its evasion maneuvers – simple ones, grand ones, wide angle deflections, short range and high speed zigzagged evasions – the variety was enough to confuse and impress the observer with the mech pilot's deft skills.

Just then, an impossibly thick laser beam ripped across the night sky. The devastatingly powerful laser beam was enough to make the mech pilot who released it shudder inside.

No one could possibly survive this laser beam! No one!

However, the impossible had happened.

On the holographic screen, the Mandate class mech suddenly blurred – the mech had gone beyond the effective range of the combined beam attack with astonishing speed as the laser beam barely graced past the mech and hit the ground. The laser beam was very powerful. It hit the ground with a loud "Boom!". A large hole was left in the ground, the surface charred black and smoldered, all signs of how terrifying the attack really was.

On the holographic screen, the mech was nowhere to be seen.

The other six mech pilots had awoken from their shock. The comms channel burst into chaotic exchanges. The first mech pilot continued to stare at the holographic screen, his mind blank.

Ye Chong wiped away cold sweat from his forehead! That was close. If that beam had touched him even slightly, he would not escape without injuries. The truth was, he knew that this success was partly due to luck. To think that his unlucky streak would finally break at this moment to save him!

Without further hesitation, Moon King dived into the forest. The uneven territory and Moon King's excellent anti scanning abilities would make him very hard to find.

As expected, the seven mechs left not long after.

The recording of the scene was sent back to the base of the Xi Feng Tribe as soon as possible.

A knock came from the door of the Tribe Leader's office.

"Come in," the beautiful Tribe Leader did not lift her head as she continued to work on the documents on her desk.

The door was pushed open, and in came a young man. "Tribe Leader, you called for me?" It was a gentle voice, pleasant to hear. The man wore a friendly, positive expression that was infectious for anyone who saw him.

The Tribe Leader finally lifted her head. She looked at the friendly young man before her and could not help a little smile as she said, "Ah, it's Jiming, come over here."

The young man looked meek as he approached the Tribe Leader. No one would have guessed that this shy and mellow young man was one of the Legendary Three of the He Yue Galaxy, and Xi Feng Tribe's most skilled personnel, Huang Jiming.

"Come and look at this recording," the Tribe Leader activated the room's holographic screen.

On the screen was a replay of the scene where Ye Chong avoided the combined beam attack.

Huang Jiming's gentle expression turned severe, and his warm, friendly charisma transformed into a sharp coldness. His whole body radiated with power. In just an instant, the disguise that he wore in his everyday life was swept away. No one would doubt the status of the current Huang Jiming as Xi Feng Tribe's most skilled combatant.

The Tribe Leader was not unsettled by his sudden change. On the contrary, she looked satisfied.

"A Mandate class mech? What a strong opponent! To think that the Ye Family has someone so capable besides Ye Yin! Giving a Mandate class mech to this pilot does not do him justice." Huang Jiming now sounded low and solemn, like he transformed into a completely different person.

The Tribe Leader looked troubled as well. "This came from the free space zone. There's still no news from Feng Su. She's officially missing. We have people searching for her, but there's no news yet. This Mandate class mech was encountered by a search team on Guang Hua planet. Feng Su's last known location was also on Guang Hua planet."

Huang Jiming narrowed his eyes. "If Feng Su were to battle with

him, it would not be terribly difficult for him to kill her. I'm just curious. For such a capable mech pilot, the Ye Family should have given him a more advanced mech, but instead he got a Mandate class."

"Is he really that strong?" The Tribe Leader seemed appalled.

"Yes." There was an undertone of battlelust in Huang Jiming's voice. "He is probably on the same level as me, Ye Yin and Siva. Any differences in strength would be almost negligible."

"Since when did the Ye Family had such a powerful expert?" The Tribe Leader lowered her head in thought.

Huang Jiming stayed silent, staring at the holographic screen.

The Tribe Leader asked abruptly, "How did he do it?"

Huang Jiming sounded impressed as he explained, "His evasion maneuvers were excellent. He had kept on with his evasions, and when the combined beam attack happened, he had made a short range high speed change in direction. The change was not large, but it was executed fast enough that it looked like a blur on the screen. Our mech pilots had aimed manually, so they could not help but respond to the sudden change in direction of the enemy. This is a mistake due to a long training history, and skilled veterans are especially susceptible. The mistake committed in aiming caused the beam to be slightly off target, which was how the mech managed to survive. Since the change in direction was short ranged, our mech pilots could not detect it. This subconscious mistake could not be detected by the pilots at all. The more capable the shooter, the more effective this trick is. Besides, notice that his high speed change in direction was done with accelerated speed. That was how his final wide angle evasion move allowed him to avoid the combined beam attack."

"Do you think you can execute the same moves?" The Tribe Leader asked.

"With great difficulty," Huang Jiming answered honestly. "This man had managed to survive a combined beam attack, and more importantly, he timed his moves well, so well that his every change in direction was timed perfectly. His final wide angle evasion move was even more impressive. Even a slight delay would have given him a different ending. On the other hand, to be honest, the guy's just extremely lucky."

"Strange, why would the Ye Family send such a skilled mech pilot to the free space zone?" The Tribe Leader muttered to herself.

Once again, Huang Jiming stayed silent. Suddenly, he lifted his head and said, "Tribe Leader, I'd like to visit the free space zone."

"You want to head to the free space zone?" The Tribe Leader seemed troubled. "Oh, Jiming, you know all too well that the Tribe is in dire need of military strength. If you go to the free space zone now ..." Seeing Huang Jiming's determined expression, the Tribe Leader could not finish her sentence.

The Tribe Leader's office fell into silence.

After a full 10 minutes, the Tribe Leader finally relented with a sigh. "Alright, go. However, please be careful. The Tribe has no men to spare right now, so you can only go alone."

"Don't worry, Tribe Leader. I've yet to meet a person who is good enough to kill me," Huang Jiming said with this unshakeable confidence.

Chapter 417: Preamble

Ye Chong could not tell if he was lucky or not. That he encountered the Xi Feng Tribe's combat squad was definitely unfortunate. However, he had survived their combined beam attack, and in that sense he was extremely lucky. In the end, Ye Chong was not a born and bred Ye Family member - Moon King's many special features were designed just for the Ye Family, so for an outsider like Ye Chong who did not receive specialized training from the Ye Family, it was impossible to unleash the full potential of the Moon King.

It was still too short a time for Ye Chong to familiarize himself with Moon King. Aside from his final move, the rest of his executions were not up to his standards. Had it been otherwise, a standard Mandate class mech would be more than enough to deal with a combat squad from the Xi Feng Tribe. Nevertheless, Ye Chong dared not test this out himself. He was still unfamiliar with Moon King. If it was only the Phoenix Class mech, he would have gotten the job done. Unfortunately, there were other mech sizes with it, and Ye Chong remembered Xi Feng Tribe's group strategy well enough.

When Ye Chong left the mountain ranges, half a month had passed since that day. In this half a month, he tried everything he could with Moon King, since it was his biggest trump card. The more advanced the mech was, the more skilled its pilot should be to draw out its full potential, else the end result would be even worse than using a low class mech. Hence, it was important for every mech pilot to use a mech that was best suited for him or her, and not simply choose the most advanced mech available.

The Mandate class mech was the most advanced mech that Ye Chong had ever maneuvered before. The commands were complicated, and on an entirely different level compared to low level mechs. Some commands were designed to fit the Ye Family's

internal training, and hard to understand for outsiders.

Ye Chong spent most of his time on these particular commands. He could only explore them slowly. Without understanding these special commands, it would be hard to make use of even half of what Moon King was truly capable of.

His hard work paid off, as shown by his current capabilities. Ye Chong believed that if he met the seven mechs again, he would have at least a 70 percent chance of defeating them. However, this success came at a price. Since Ye Chong did not understand all the special commands, every time he initiated one of them, he could only wait nervously until the mech performed its preset maneuvers.

Once, on the ground, Ye Chong initiated one of the unknown commands, and Moon King suddenly turned around and went head first into the ground. Ye Chong nearly vomited from the violent movements. Later, he found out that it was actually a Three-step Zigzag Retreat. Surprises like this happened often and exhausting, even with Ye Chong's strong body and mind.

Ye Chong tried all 326 unknown commands in Moon King. This allowed him to become familiar with the mech and understand more about the Ye Family mech piloting skills.

Feng Su was not doing much better than Ye Chong. The hellish training bore down heavily on her. Whatever weakness left in her was replaced with a steel determination. Her eyes gleamed coldly with the readiness to kill. Tackan and his group kept her under strict watch, monitoring her every move. All her belongings were taken away, including her dimension keystone. They would only return them to her after the Congregation.

"Let's go. Seems that the guy's not coming back," Tackan said with disappointment.

A young man with a wooden spear in hand walked towards them slowly.

Ye Chong's arrival was met with joy on Tackan's side. Ye Chong stole a glance at Feng Su, and kept his surprise to himself. She looked like she had suffered plenty these days. She now seemed more ruthless due to Tackan and his gang's company. For some reason, Ye Chong suddenly felt indifferent about her situation. If Shang were to see her now, would he still call her a beauty?

Mu and Shang was not aware of Ye Chong's situation. They were now very busy. Due to the Shi Family's cooperation, they had rapidly obtained a huge amount of resources. The completion of their first virtual world node laboratory marked a significant improvement in their strength. Little Rock, the rigid genius, was the main star of the laboratory. His computing skills were astonishing, and even Mu and Shang were thoroughly impressed.

The virtual world was not as common in the He Yua Galaxy, but any slightly powerful organization would enter the virtual world. After all, information exchange in this place was unparalleled. This also made the virtual world more singular in purpose compared to that of the Five Galaxies, but also more dangerous.

Mu and Shang's node laboratory had been attacked for no less than two dozen times. The strength of each attack was unimaginable in the Five Galaxies. Aside from the first three attacks, where Mu lent a hand to Little Rock, the rest of them were dealt only by Little Rock himself, showing his extraordinary skills as a Maverick. With solid computational skills for backing, careful planning and endless patience, Little Rock grew stronger and stronger as he fought in the arena of the virtual world.

By now, He Yue Galaxy was in a state of great tension. The large scale military personnel reassignments by the Three Aristocratic Families were hard to miss for the curious ones, and even Little Rock could acquire plenty of information in this regard in the virtual world. Nonetheless, the Three Aristocratic Families did not explain their movements. No one knew where the military troops

were reassigned to. They seemed to just vanish into thin air.

This created anxiety for other local forces. For second tier aristocratic families like the Shi Family, it was very important news. Currently, they were amassing power, and needed a certain period of peace to adjust to their size. Once the war amongst the Three Aristocratic Families began, the He Yue Galaxy would be plunged into a state of chaos, and the Shi Family must do its best to survive the turmoil.

Just what was the Three Aristocratic Families were up to? No one had an answer to that question.

"Sister Bing, don't worry too much. Brother Ye will be fine," the little boy looked up at Rui Bing and offered some words of comfort. Around him were dozens of huge men, looking around anxiously as if expecting an enemy. No one expected the Young Master to go to the planet of Risserd. Now, almost the entire force of the Xue Lai Clan on that planet was converging onto his location.

When Ye Chong was separated from them, they failed to find him. Left with no other choice, the young boy asked for assistance from the Clan's forces on Dankwood planet. Still, there was no news of Ye Chong. With the upcoming Congregation, the largest event in the entire free space zone that was organized every four years, they believed that Ye Chong might just show himself there. It seemed like a plausible idea. After leaving enough men to continue the search, the young boy and his company headed for Risserd. They never would have expected Ye Chong to leave Dankwood planet for the planet of Guang Hua.

In Flying Moon City, on Risserd. As the Congregation drew near, the number of strong individuals sharply increased in the vicinity. Where Jie Experts were rarely seen in other places, they were noticeable everywhere here. It was no wonder that the young boy's bodyguards were all nervous.

Using mechs here in the open would be too conspicuous, but

without mechs, they were helplessly weak compared to the combat experts around them. Moreover, the Youngest Young Master had always been eager to make trouble, thoroughly enjoying himself in the process.

Looking at the curious eyes of their Youngest Young Master, the bodyguards could not help but feel dread for their future. Finally, Xue Lai Clan's Risserd force leader could not stand it anymore, and said, "Youngest Young Master, let us return home for now. It's better if we lay low for now. Master Siva will be here in three days. Until then, your safety ..."

"Lil' Siva is coming?" The young boy was surprised, and did not welcome the news. He mumbled, "That guy, he's just so boring." Hearing the Youngest Young Master referring to Siva as Lil' Siva made the other bodyguards' expressions turned uncomfortable. Siva was the strongest of the Clan, a mysterious character to most of the Clan's members. There were numerous legends about him, but no one had seemed to have seen his face.

It was strange to hear Xue Clai Clan's Number One being referred to like a boy by another seven-year old boy. However, despite their odd expressions, none of them laughed. Perhaps the Youngest Young Master was the only member of the Xue Lai Clan who dared to use the nickname "Lil' Siva".

Rui Bing was lost in thought, and did not seem to notice her surroundings. Her usual clear expression was now clouded in misery. After being separated from Ye Chong, she had been in a poor mood. Every time she thought of the numerous enemies that he faced, her heart ached; every time she recalled him getting further and further away from her, her heart bled. Until now, there was still no news of him.

Seeing Rui Bing's worried face, a flash of concern appeared in the young boy's eyes. Suddenly, he thought of something, and tugged at Rui Bing's sleeve and said, "Sister Bing, I've an idea."

Rui Bing refocused herself. "What idea?" The young boy was mischievous, but smart. Perhaps he really had something useful.

"Think about it, Sister Bin. The Congregation is attended by all strong individuals in the free space zone. Besides, I think that the names of those ranked in the first 10 will be spread to every planet. If Sister Bing can make it into the first 10, your name will be known throughout the entire free space zone." The young boy was already imagining it in his head as he said this.

Rui Bing could not help but feel disappointed. She shook her head and plainly said, "I have not been interested in those things since a long time ago."

"No, not that," the young boy quickly explained, "If your name is known in the entire free space zone, then Brother Ye will surely know about it, right? If Brother Ye knows that Sister Bing is on Risserd, he will surely find a way to get here as soon as possible. Then you'll be able to see each other again."

Rui Bing jolted in realization, and froze in thought. After a long moment, she acknowledged his point softly. Her eyes cleared up until she looked like her usual self. Her eyes reflected an immovable determination.

No one would have guessed that Ye Chong was also heading towards planet Risserd right then.

In fact, Ye Chong was not the only one heading towards Risserd ...

Chapter 418: Feng Su's Transformation

"We are now heading for planet Risserd. Both your candidacies in the Congregation are settled. Hehe, we from the planet of Guang Hua will surely surprise them all," Liu Sheng chatted eagerly with Ye Chong.

Ye Chong received an entirely different form of treatment compared to Feng Su, but the latter did not hold anything against him, since this was the result of their difference in strength. Ye Chong's strength was acknowledged by everyone here, including Feng Su herself. The first to fight against Ye Chong was Tackan, and everyone else watched with interest, eager to be next themselves. If it was someone else, they would have been intimidated by the fierce glares from so many strong people. However, for Ye Chong, who had spent time at the Sang Family Village, it was only child's play.

No matter who Ye Chong fought against, everyone else would be there to watch the battle. After all, it was a rare opportunity to watch an expert fight. Watching him fight was important in improving themselves. After attaining Jie, any kind of improvement would be hard won, so Tackan and his group had came up with this method after much discussion.

Feng Su was surprised every time she saw the young man fight. She felt increasingly familiar about the young man, but could not remember who he really was. She was confident of her feelings, and believed that she must have seen him before. It was only a matter of time before she remembered him.

Nonetheless, this was the free space zone. She had never been here before. No one should look familiar to her here, so why was she having this strong sense of familiarity? The question vexed her.

Feng Su had fought against Ye Chong countless times, but she

was defeated completely every single time. Ye Chong never held back. He never particularly liked her anyway. It was just that sometimes seeing her reminded him of Shang, and that made him more wary. After all, he and the Xi Feng Tribe were in conflict.

Now that he was stronger, Feng Su's combat style no longer impressed him as much as when he first saw her. He could even tell how she made her tricky moves. Ye Chong was not a mentalist, but Huang Baiyi's influence had given him a strong theoretical understanding of mentalist skills, stronger than Feng Su's. Xi Feng Tribe's mentalists failed to inherit a lot of their predecessors' knowledge. In terms of mentalist skill theory, Ye Chong was definitely superior.

However, Ye Chong did not tell any of this to Feng Su, but adopted an apathy towards her instead.

"These are the young lady's things, best if you keep them. I'm just a careless guy, I might just lose them somewhere." Liu Sheng handed over a small bag. After some time of getting to know each other, Ye Chong and the six in the group had formed a strange form of friendship.

"Okay." Ye Chong took the small bag. He opened it to inspect, and found a dimension keystone inside. Without betraying his findings, Ye Chong accepted the small bag quietly. The dimension keystone itself was not particularly valuable to him. All advanced level mechs of the Three Aristocratic Families would keep their owner's information in them, even after the master's death. Hence, outsiders would almost never be able to get their hands on advanced level mechs from the Three Aristocratic Families. It was extremely unlikely to have a person like Ye Luo, who would willingly give away his mech.

However, Ye Chong still accepted the bag. With the dimension keystone in his hands, Feng Su's usage of her mech would be for him to decide. Without her mech, Feng Su was like a toothless tiger, unable to touch him. Otherwise, Ye Chong would never have

one of Xi Feng Tribe's advanced level mech pilots so close to him.

The starry sky outside the starship was mesmerizing. Ye Chong suddenly had an impulse to just leave the starship with Moon King. It must be a wonderful experience, flying Moon King in outer space.

Ye Chong and the rest of them were now in a starship, albeit a very ancient one. Fortunately, Ye Chong had experience with it, so he was not too surprised. Feng Su, however, was seeing a starship this old for the first time, and could not hide the surprise in her eyes.

"First time riding a starship, huh?" Liu Sheng grinned widely. Once he grew close to someone, he would turn very friendly. He had asked his question because for most of the residents in the free space zone, few of them had ever sat in a starship.

Seeing the ancient starship, Ye Chong nodded a little helplessly and replied, "Yes, first time."

"Hehe, don't worry. You'll get to fly with her again in another four years. You know, the first time I flew in this large metal can, I got dizzy as hell. After that, I got used to it. Truth be told, she flies too slowly, this one. Such a bore!" Liu Sheng shrugged and explained, affecting a weathered tone.

The starship was far from comfortable, and it lacked in facilities, nothing compared to the luxury of Coxcomb. Ye Chong nodded in agreement. "Yes, you're right." He could not help but notice Feng Su, who was holding on against Sisko's fierce attacks. He was surprised to see her improve so fast.

Hearing Ye Chong's agreement, Liu Sheng continued, encouraged, "Sigh, ain't that it? The journey's long and dry. If only I can bring along a lady or two to help pass the time!" Liu Sheng looked regretful.

Ye Chong's attention was diverted to the fight between the two.

Feng Su seemed to show an unusual persistence, and her rare retaliations were sharp, disrupting Sisko's rhythm.

Observing the battle from the outside, Ye Chong realized that Feng Su's special ability must have been awakened. Initially, Ye Chong had thought it odd that Feng Su, a Jie expert, performed so weakly. However, after watching her fighting against others repeatedly, he gradually realized that firstly, she lacked combat experience, and secondly, her special ability was not yet awakened.

Xi Feng Tribe had a long history in mentalist training. What would their special ability look like? Ye Chong's apathy was broken by a sudden curiosity.

"Huh?" Even Liu Sheng began to notice something was amiss.

Sisko was very strong. His bulky muscles showed as much, making him look like a small tower of a person. His muscles bulged up with angular edges, which gave him a scary look. He was ill tempered, and fought like a mad berserker. His overwhelming attacks was also a pain for Ye Chong. His techniques were simple and practical, with no flowery moves, aiming to win by pure strength. Besides, his stamina was just as impressive as his muscles. He could sustain his attacks continuously for long periods of time.

Before his large, towering figure, Feng Su looked just like a seven year old girl standing before a large man. A mad beast fighting against a weak and beautiful woman - this was the proverbial beauty and the beast.

Usually, Feng Su could only brace herself against Sisko's attacks like a tiny boat weathering a storm in the middle of the sea. Her strength was like a mosquito's against Sisko - they were on completely different levels.

Today, Feng Su remained on the defense, barely holding off her opponent, but with all the expert eyes studying the fight, of course they would notice that something was different!

However, the only one who knew exactly what was going on was Ye Chong. He understood the situation even better than Feng Su herself. Huang Baiyi's education on mentalists allowed him to make an accurate analysis of the situation.

"Hmm, Mental Foresight, a very practical skill." Ye Chong thought to himself as he watched Feng Su grew steadier and more relaxed in her battle.

The transformation of a Jie expert was often over in a second, but this short moment was the culmination of all earlier experiences, none of which could have been skipped over.

Feng Su moved like a delicate butterfly, avoiding the continuous blows with ease. It was as if she could predict Sisko's every move. Often when Sisko had just began his attack move, she already had begun her evasion.

It was a strange sight to behold. The two of them were like a pair of coordinated lovers. Soon, Sisko's attacks could no longer touch Feng Su. His every attack was avoided, and that frustrated him to no end. However, Feng Su could not pose a threat to Sisko too, since she could not hope to compare against the man's strength or speed.

Ye Chong's mind was turning quickly, trying to figure out a way to overcome this special skill. Huang Baiyi had said that it felt like watching an event on rewind in his head. The fierce battle no longer held his interest. He lowered his head and began to think.

Once he began, Ye Chong did not stop thinking about it for three days. In these three days, Feng Su had challenged another four of the group. Aside from Dong Mo, who had won against Feng Su with great difficulty, the other three had ended up in a tie against her. Of course, as an alchemist, Kurdi was not one of Feng Su's opponents.

These battles eventually led the group to acknowledge her status as an equal in the group. Strength determined everything. Since

she was strong, she would receive equal treatment.

On the fourth day, Feng Su approached Ye Chong.

"Please return my things to me," Feng Su demanded coldly. She heard from Liu Sheng that her bag was not in the hands of this young man. After spending so many days enclosed in the ship, her dark skin had turned fair again. Her former beauty was once again presented to the people around her.

Ye Chong lifted his head, annoyed by the disruption in his thought process.

Ye Chong looked at Feng Su, and was surprised to find that she looked a little different. She was imbued with faint a sense of confidence found in skillful experts.

"Please return my things to me!" Feng Su repeated her request louder, raising her eyebrow.

Ye Chong studied her silently for half a minute before replying in a gentle but determined voice, "I refuse."

Returning her things to her! Ye Chong was not like the other six ignorant people. To return the dimension keystone to this strong and definitely not friendly mech pilot was something that Ye Chong would never do.

The other six in the group looked towards them, surprised. They could not understand why Ye Chong would deny this perfectly reasonable request.

Chapter 419: This Young Man Is A Little Cold

She suddenly reached out with her right hand, her hand fisted and aimed towards Ye Chong's weak spot.

If she had learned anything at all recently, it was all of the qualities that make for a fine combat expert. That punch came abruptly without warning. Her battles against Sisko and his group these days had made her more confident of herself.

Ye Chong leapt back lightly in a seemingly impossible step, avoiding the blow.

Tackan and the others immediately began to follow Ye Chong's every move closely. After her transformation, Feng Su was becoming a problem to solve for them. They could not find her weakness. They wanted to see how Ye Chong would deal with her.

The situation looked precarious, but Ye Chong's expression was calm and collected, without any changes.

He avoided the blow, but the danger was not over yet. Feng Su seemed to have anticipated Ye Chong's move. She stepped lightly on the ground and launched herself forward, straight towards Ye Chong. She pulled back her fist, ready to punch.

Feng Su's eyes were fixed on the young man before her. She could even see every movement of his muscles.

Ye Chong's brows knitted together. His upper body was rigid as his right arm suddenly extended out like a whip towards Feng Su.

That seemingly impossible motion caught the attention of Tackan and his group. They had never seen Ye Chong use this move when fighting against them before. Everyone stood up instinctively and approached the fighting pair.

The September Lan Family's muscle control techniques allowed

Ye Chong to execute bizarre movements. These movements were all surprising and difficult to predict.

This time, however, it did not hinder his opponent, much to his surprise. As if she knew exactly what Ye Chong would do, Feng Su suddenly bent down and evaded Ye Chong's right arm, her right fist coming towards Ye Chong like a bolt of lightning.

"Roar!" Ye Chong suddenly cried out! Mortal Roar! It was also a technique of the September Lan Family.

A formless sound wave spread out rapidly away from him.

Unexpectedly, the wide range attack had affected the observers more. The ones who were watching immediately howled in pain, blocking their ears with their hands as they retreated quickly.

The one closest to Ye Chong, Feng Su, was affected the least. Just as Ye Chong began his Mortal Roar, she had already slipped backwards quickly, and only the aftershocks of the attack managed to ruffle her hair.

Once again, the distance between the two of them was widened.

Feng Su's eyes turned serious. As expected, this young man was the hardest of the group to deal with. She did not initiate an attack again. The Mortal Roar had made her wary.

Ye Chong began to look at Feng Su in a new light. This new Feng Su was more difficult to deal with than he had imagined. Ye Chong had fought with Feng Su before this, and her current powers of foresight were much stronger than before. Her foresight ability now was enough to make Ye Chong feel threatened. Even that Mortal Roar, an attack that had almost no precursor moves, had been easily avoided by her. This foresight ability was truly powerful.

These few days, Ye Chong had been thinking about the weakness of Feng Su's special technique. He knew that every technique would have its own weaknesses, elements that could not be

handled well by the technique. If this blind spot was properly taken advantage of, winning would not be an issue.

Huang Baiyi had said that mentalists were more sensitive than most to changes in their surroundings due to long periods of mental training. In this respect, mentalists were even better than combat experts. Besides, they were very sensitive to threats. For someone as powerful as Huang Baiyi, he would literally be able to tell the exact moment someone had thoughts of killing him.

Mental Foresight was based on these two kinds of sensitivities.

It was not too complicated to explain it, but to reach Feng Su's level of ability would require very long periods of hard work and an element of luck. Even knowing the theory behind this technique, Ye Chong still could not figure out how to fight her. If she could avoid an attack like Mortal Roar, then Ye Chong could not even be certain if it was because of Feng Su's instinct or her sensitivity to her surroundings.

These were two entirely different concepts.

If it was instinct, then Ye Chong would not worry too much about it. Even Huang Baiyi had admitted that the skill was not always accurate. The man's instincts were accurate only about 20 to 30 percent of the time. Only God would have a perfect instinct. If someone of Huang Baiyi's level could only have 20 to 30 percent accuracy when it comes to instincts, then Feng Su would definitely not be better than that.

If it was due to the sensitivity to her surroundings, then the problem became much harder. This was unlike instinct, its accuracy not attributed to luck, but to skill. Besides, any person trained as a mentalist would be mentally strong enough to avoid careless mistakes.

The two of them stared at each other without moving. As he stared coldly at his opponent, Ye Chong suddenly felt his body temperature rising. This new experience had got him excited!

The paradoxical emotion of calmness and excitement were melded together perfectly in him once again.

Tension filled the air between them. The others who were watching were also excited. Battles of this level were hard to find, and they had a feeling that the young man was about to fight for real! Everyone kept their eyes peeled, for fear of missing a single detail.

Ye Chong concentrated like never before. Blue lines appeared in his vision, some large, some small, and blue dots in a variety of brightness.were scattered between these blue lines.

Facing an unknown threat, Ye Chong's special technique from attaining Jie now revealed itself.

Dangerous! Ye Chong's entire being was radiating with danger that felt like a solid barrier. No one expected to see that typically calm and composed young man to be so strong! Tackan and his friends began to feel terrified. They retreated slowly, trying their best to avoid attention.

Feng Su's expression changed. Her opponent's strength had far exceeded her expectations.

"Well, take them if you want. I don't care much for them anyway. Heehee, it's a gift to you, remember that, think of it as a love token, so take care of it!"

Just when everyone thought a colossal battle was impending, Feng Su suddenly smiled, stretching her curvy waist. Her curves were once described by Shang as the most beautiful of all, and she was now as bewitching as ever. Even more enticing was her lazy and teasing demeanor, done in an entirely natural way.

The coldness in Feng Su left, and was replaced with devilish charm. Her smile was like a spring breeze, thawing the ice of the earlier cold tension.

She stretched her neck smoothly and without wariness before Ye

Chong, all the defensiveness gone from her every move, as though Ye Chong was her lover, quietly studying her beauty.

This abrupt twist was completely unexpected, and Tackan and his friends could only stare with their mouths open wide, sighing unconsciously.

Ye Chong studied Feng Su quietly, a dangerous aura still emanating from him.

Feng Su's hair was shook loose from her hair band due to Ye Chong's Mortal Roar. Her dark, gleaming tress flowed down along her body. Feng Su stole a quick, playful look at Ye Chong, and quickly looked away. Her slender, fair hands combed through her hair softly in a feminine fashion.

Suddenly, everyone felt the dangerous aura vanish from the room.

Ye Chong turned away coldly and left, without looking back at Feng Su.

As Ye Chong finally disappeared from view, Feng Su's tense body finally relaxed. No one noticed that her back was already covered in sweat.

In the coming days, Feng Su behaved obediently, the ruthless character in her hidden deep inside. She was once again the beautiful and mesmerizing Feng Su from before. Her every move was tantalizing, the very image of the Devil's charms.

Even Sisko, who lacked aesthetic appreciation, was beginning to look at her more.

The only one who was unaffected was Ye Chong.

Feng Su spent the most time with Ye Chong. She noticed now that as long as she did not interrupt his thought, the young man would not care about whether she was near him.

More discouraging was the fact that, no matter how she tried to

seduce him, the young man seemed to have a heart made of stone, and he never budged.

This frustrated Feng Su to no end. On the other hand, the young man had tied her small bag onto his waist, where she could almost reach it.

But she never would! She believed that if she tried that, the consequences would be unbearable. Would he kill her? It was more than likely! She would not risk her life for that. Every day, she could only watch her bag on the young man's waist from afar, cursing the stone hearted young man.

One thing vexed her as well - could the young man actually recognized what was in her bag? She sat beside him, thinking about it. The young man was also deep in thought, and she dared not disturb him.

Could he have recognized the dimension keystone? Could he be an outsider, just like her? If this was the case ... Her pulse quickened!

Ye Chong was very sensitive to his surroundings, and Feng Su's suddenly accelerated pulse rate broke his train of thought. He took an odd glance at Feng Su.

Noticing Ye Chong's gaze, Feng Su returned it with a sweet smile, and quickly lowered her head.

Ye Chong did not mind her, and continued on with his thoughts.

Chapter 420: Arriving At Risserd

"To join the Congregation is not hard at all. Hehe, I've done my homework. Risserd has 20 places reserved, 10 more than other planets. As long as you can beat one of them, Sister Bing, the rest will be easy." The young boy rested his chin on his hands as he explained with a smile.

Rui Bing thought about it for a moment, saying nothing.

The general, leader of the young boy's bodyguards, said oddly, "Master Siva should be here by today! Why has he not shown himself?" The legendary Number One of the Tribe was someone he respected a lot, that was why he was beginning to feel nervous.

The young boy rolled his eyes and said, "Lil' Siva is here already. You just don't know it."

"Where? Where?" The general looked around him, but could not see the person he admired so much.

"No need to find him, you won't find him anyway. Lil' Siva never likes to come out in the open," the young boy said this like someone who knew it best.

"Huh, when did you get this?" Fei Si lowered herself and studied the pendant hanging from the young boy's neck. The pendant was made of some unknown material, shining with a dim metallic glimmer like a coin, covered with strange patterns.

"So huge!" The young boy did not answer her as he stared blankly at the exposed point between her open collar.

"So naughty at such a young age! You asked for it!" Fei Si blushed and flicked her finger lightly on his forehead.

Fei Si's action made the bodyguards around them immediately uncomfortable.

The young boy rubbed his forehead and laughed suggestively.

"Sister Fei Si ..."

Seeing the young boy's odd expression, Fei Si blushed again. She raised her hand in the act of hitting him and said, "Humph, guess I'll have to teach you a lesson!"

The young boy quickly ran away, but still laughing weirdly as he left.

"What? You haven't found him?" Huang Jiming sounded disappointed. He had arrived at Guang Hua planet for some time, but there was no news of the Mandate class mech. It was like the mech had vanished into thin air.

"Yes, Master Jiming. We have kept all known Ye Family's base of operations on planet Guang Hua under surveillance, but there's still no sign of the mech. There's also no news on Madam Feng Su yet. We believe that she must have met with a fatal accident." Xi Feng Tribe's temporary person in charge on Guang Hua reported respectfully. Ever since the Abductor incident, Xi Feng Tribe had removed nearly all their forces from Guang Hua. These days, they only allocated limited resources discreetly on Guang Hua. In searching for Feng Su, the Tribe had used all personnel on the planet, and even reassigned people from nearby planets to assist in the search.

"Hmm, the search for Madam Feng Su must not cease," Huang Jiming spoke with a low voice. Feng Su may not be enjoying as high a reputation as Huang Jiming himself in the Tribe, but she was very popular. Feng Su was not originally from the Xi Feng Tribe, but she had attained Jie from her own efforts, and was conferred a Phoenix class mech by the Tribe Leader herself. This was an honor that was unprecedented. Huang Jiming admired her for this as well. Of course, the other reason was her otherworldly beauty. Many mech pilots in the Tribe had a crush on her, and Huang Jiming himself could not help but felt curious of the young woman too.

Since the Mandate class mech was nowhere to be found, Huang Jiming felt deflated. He asked, "So, what's there to do in the free space zone?" This was his first time in the free space zone. Rumour had it that this was where the Tribe originated from, and that was one of the reasons he wanted to come here.

"If Sir would like to sightsee, Risserd would be a good choice. The quadrennial Congregation is about to begin. If Master Jiming is available, it is an event that might be worth your attention. Many experts would gather there. There are no mech pilots, but the combat experts, mentalists and alchemists present are much stronger than our people."

"Oh, a Congregation?" Huang Jiming's interest was instantly piqued.

The starship landed smoothly.

The only families that owned starships on planet Risserd were the Yan and Huang Families. These two families were the Big Two in the entire free space zone. They also had the longest histories compared to any other tribe in the free space zone, and enjoyed high reputation. The two families gave birth to many strong members, and they often took up half of planet Risserd's allocated openings for the Congregation.

Guests for the Congregation this year were handled by the Yan Family.

When Ye Chong and his company left the starship, they found that the dock was almost full with other starships. It seemed that many Congregation members from other planets had already arrived. The docking area of the Yan and Huang Families was the largest in the entire free space zone.

Ye Chong and his bunch did not stand out much. Guang Hua was an alchemist center, but it was already below average compared the entire free space zone in terms of combat.

As they left the ship, staff members appeared for ushering. This was not the first trip for Tackan and his friends, so they were familiar with the procedure.

Ye Chong and company were led into the Yan Family compound. Every planet's Congregation representatives would be provided with special accommodation.

"This will be where you stay throughout the Congregation. Our Family will provide your meals. If you have other requests, please let us know. We will do what we can to assist you." The usherer from the Yan Family bowed formally, but he could not help but steal a glance at Feng Su. Female Jie experts were rare, and female Jie experts who could attend the Congregation were rarer still.

Of course, more importantly, this was a very beautiful Congregation contender. She would definitely rank high in the lineup of the most beautiful female Congregation contenders in history.

"Alright." It was Liu Sheng who replied with courtesy. No matter how bad they behaved normally, it would not do to act carelessly in the Yan Family.

The Yan Family disciple disciplined himself as well as someone from an aristocratic family ought to, quickly directing his attention away from Feng Su, composed himself, and said, "I hope you will all feel at home. The last group of Congregation contenders will be arriving tomorrow afternoon. The Family head and wife has prepared a banquet to welcome all of you. Please honor us with your presence!"

"Of course! We'll be sure to join you," Liu Sheng answered swiftly.

Liu Sheng's attitude must have won the usherer's favor, for the man smiled as he said, "You must be tired from your long journey. Please rest well." He then left their house.

"It's best if everyone stayed within the building. Any sightseeing of the area can wait until after the Congregation. If you have to leave for urgent matters, remember to bring your weapon with you," Liu Sheng advised the group seriously, but the words were obviously meant for Ye Chong and Feng Su. They were the only newcomers. The rest of the group did not even deign to pay him any attention.

"Is it really that dicey out there?" Feng Su asked in surprise.

"Dicey?" Liu Sheng chuckled carelessly and said, "That word doesn't quite describe it. Many capable people died right here every year, you know? Risserd has another name, called the Pro's Graveyard. Don't think that Jie experts can do as they please here. The Jie experts here, hehe, you'll know exactly how strong they are very soon."

Ye Chong ignored him. He did not intend to go out anyway. Sightseeing was not one of his hobbies. Besides, he did not want to get into trouble. While his looks had been altered, making him difficult to be recognized, it was still better to lay low. Ye Chong understood the importance of that.

Feng Su thought about it for a moment, and returned to her room as well.

The Congregation, a spectacular event that many had dreamed to be a part of, did not excite Ye Chong at all. The only reason he was here was because he had promised Tackan and his group, and also because he was a little curious of all the experts that were said to surface in this event. However, he would mostly observe the Congregation without getting involved. This was only a chance to expand his worldview. He did not care to think about what role he should play in the event.

Because of his intentions, Ye Chong was quite relaxed, while Liu Sheng and others were all stressed out.

Dinner was sent over by the Yan Family's people. The meal was

excellent, and Ye Chong went into a good mood because of it.

After dinner, when Ye Chong was about to return to his room, he suddenly heard Feng Su said, "I want to go out for a walk, anyone want to accompany me?" Her sweet voice was tempting.

Liu Sheng and company could not help but frown. They did not expect Feng Su to actually plan to head out.

Just when everyone was at a lost, a calm voice came from behind them, saying, "Don't go out."

It was Ye Chong. He had reached the door, and stood before it to stop her from leaving. Letting Feng Su out? He knew exactly who Feng Su was. It was impossible for the Xi Feng Tribe to be powerless on such an important planet. If he let Feng Su out now, she would surely return with a whole squad of mechs to kill them. It would be too late for him then.

"You're stopping me? Why?" Feng Su asked calmly, as though Ye Chong's objection was expected.

The others looked to Ye Chong. They had noticed the strange relationship between the two of them. When Ye Chong first refused to return Feng Su's bag, they had already thought it strange. The fact that he was stopping her from leaving now was even more confusing. Was he worried about Feng Su? The cold look on Ye Chong's face ruled out that possibility.

"No particular reason." Ye Chong did not budge.

"You know who I am, don't you?" Feng Su's eyes were fixed on Ye Chong as she asked this question out of the blue.

Chapter 421: Heroes Are Gathering

"Yes," said Ye Chong with a firm nod as he did not intend to decline.

"What..." The reply was part of Feng Su's prediction but it still sounded shocking coming from Ye Chong's mouth, "What are you...?"

"I can't tell you."

"Do you really think you could defeat me?" Feng Su said in a threatening tone. If the foe was fully aware of her identity as well as her hand, her security would be very much breached.

The atmosphere grew cold as Tackan stood up with the rest. As being unaware of the exact relationship between the two persons, they did not state their stance yet. It simply was not the time yet, they should observe for now. They identified someone's stranding by the strength and Feng Su had earned their respect with her strength, thus she shared the equal status with the entire team.

"Do you think you could leave here safely if I went all out?" That was the last nail to the coffin, seriously Ye Chong no longer had a way out without a fight. Tackan and the others started frowning. The group had already divided against itself before the Congregation even started. A battle would take place, and very likely it would be a dead-or-alive battle. The others looked at the silent two worrisomely. They did not intend to get involved in the conflict however, as a sign of respect towards the strong.

"Your physic abilities are pretty good," initiated Ye Chong, "but they do not impose threats on me. Your coordination lacks practice," said Ye Chong briefly which had caused Feng Su's eyes to enlarge.

"Coordi-what?" Tackan sounded confused, so were his men. That was the first time they heard of such term.

Feng Su's rationality sank deep into the abyss, as her quivering eyes set upon that frail-looking silhouette at the door. It was not strange for outsiders like Tackan's group to not understand the term "coordination", since it was a specialized term that meant the coordination between one's mentality and body in Mentalist's studies.

But how in the world does he know "coordination"? That is a term only known by the real professionals, an uncommon term in the field too... Wait, he said my coordination lacks practices... so...

Feng Su was not foolish, she realized the weakness of her ability the moment Ye Chong mentioned it.

She had very good mental foresight but her body could not follow the pace of her vision, causing a tiny delay between each session and that was more than enough to cost her life!

Feng Su's face went all chalky out of sudden, as her biggest weakness - which she herself never realized - just got revealed by one stranger. Her will to battle extinguished, as being truly horrified.

Horrible... This boy is horrible...

Her eyes went frightfully wide.

Her only reliance had been revealed to be totally unreliable. Her trump card was flipped right to the floor by her foe. The fear in Feng Su's eyes was fully captured by Ye Chong, who acted all calm and unreadable. Well, it did take Ye Chong a few days to identify the issue of Feng Su's foresight ability. Feng Su might be one of the few top mentalists among her tribe, but Ye Chong had way better understanding and experience with mentalists' studies. So he eventually saw it, the very weakness of her future sight.

It only took one simple line from Ye Chong to shatter every last bit of confidence in Feng Su.

Feng Su glared at Ye Chong, with the vanishing entity in her

eyes.

The staring lasted for about 10 minutes and Ye Chong remained indifferent. Tackan and the rest had become fairly cautious of this boy, as warning of not messing with him kept ringing inside their head.

Feng Su then stormed back into her room without a word.

... (Meanwhile)...

Ye Yin sat right next to Ye Luo.

"Didn't you say that he might be coming for the Congregation?" asked Ye Yin nonchalantly.

"As you've heard, he might, the modal verb is used to express possibility. If I wanted to say he's coming for sure, I'll use the modal verb must."

"What do you mean?" asked Ye Yin angrily with a raise of brows.

"Alright, alright...", Ye Luo replied laboriously. "Keep your 'I'm Ye Yin the Great' look, how many times must I remind you of this? Stay low! Stay low! You must stay low! At this rate you seriously could begin counting the number of eyes at us now."

"I too, must remind you," Ye Yin tried inhibiting his fury, "It is the leader's order to bring him back! Are you implying a mutiny on your side?"

"Holy Ye!" Ye Luo exaggerated his tone. "Didn't I look cooperative enough? Which part of me said 'mutiny'? Did I betray anything? Do you know how many connections I've utilized in order to get you on this ship? You said you wanted to go to the Congregation, then I got you to the Congregation. Without a single hesitation. Please stop accusing the innocent!"

Ye Yin, the number one pilot of Ye family was finding this Ye Luo a handful child to have on a ride. Well, Ye Luo had always been that troubling child in his eyes since childhood. Ye Yin was the

first pilot in the family, while Ye Luo was the first martial arts practitioner in the family. Both of them achieved something in the end. Moreover, Ye Luo was also the eldest son in the family, thus his fearless attitude towards Ye Yin. The mission of escorting Ye Chong did not work well this time, although Ye Yin accidentally netted Ye Luo eventually. He could not be simply letting Ye Luo go, since Ye Luo was the one who submitted the report to the family, he must know Ye Chong's whereabouts.

He would love to cooperate, but Ye Luo was never the cooperative kind in the family, not even under every sincere plight and Ye Yin could not force him to work his way. This Ye Luo was shameless enough to remain the same stubborn even after being placed on a guillotine, and Ye Yin hated that to the core. Ye Luo agreed to "assist" him only when Ye Yin used the name of the leader in the first place.

And that was why they headed to Risserd, as Ye Luo said that Ye Chong could be joining the Congregation this year. Ye Luo was fine with the operation, on one single condition - only Ye Yin would be allowed to come along. Well Ye Yin was confident in settling Ye Chong singlehandedly, he was the top fighter in He Yue galaxy after all.

Hah, the truth was, Ye Luo told Ye Yin that it might be likely to see the boy at the Congregation merely because Ye Luo wanted to join the Congregation himself. Yes, it was a fabrication to gain a free ride to the Congregation. He was qualified being the ace of Dankwood's last congregation anyway. Regarding the leader's "ultimate order", he did not care. He would love to come alone but certainly Ye Yin would never allow that.

Ye Luo must attend the Congregation, by hook or by crook. He was willing to kill in order to attend the event. He would kill himself if he did not make it.

Well, so, Ye Luo, by making an excuse of bringing his brother to have a mind-opening operation, dragged Ye Yin to the ship. Those

dismissive looks from the crew members had occasionally enraged Ye Yin a few times.

...(Meanwhile)...

"Who... should we... mess... with...", muttered the little boy, with thumb on his chin, as he skimmed through the list.

Both Yan and Huang families are too skillful to mess with, so they are a big no-no.

So... hmmm

The little boy pondered, "Ah..." He reached out his fleshy finger, "He'll do," with a smile at the beautiful sister near him.

...(Congregation the day before)...

Something happened that caught everyone's attention, even before the event commenced.

Doc Danelles, the top fighter of Risserd had apparently received an appointed challenge from a white-garbed lady at his accommodation.

Every other fighters nearby were alarmed, as they watched Danelles accepting the challenge like a man.

The outcome? He lost and he sincerely transferred his rights to this white-garbed lady.

Everyone agreed as they backed off.

The discussion started brewing among the residents, not on the strength of this lady, but on that freezing charm of hers. It took only a few days for Rui Bing to become the hottest topic for the Congregation this year.

"Rui Bing? Are all females this strong today?" muttered Huang Jiming at one corner of the hotel's lobby. Congregation is so intriguing. I have never see this in the tribe, maybe... maybe I should join too.

Somehow the thought had caught onto Huang Jiming.

He would not be joining as a martial arts practitioner, since he knew his fists well. Alchemy? Nah, he could not even differentiate a tube and a flask. He could try his luck joining as a mentalist though, since his Xi Feng tribe was the local resident of free space zone while being the few top tribes of master mentalist, although most of his descendants had moved on to piloting. He believed he could still do something with his mentalist capabilities.

I might not be able to find that fella, but at least this sounds entertaining enough.

Thought Huang Jiming with a bright smile, which somehow caught the attention of the waitress who poured too much tea in the cup.

And later in the afternoon, a rather handsome mentalist had successfully joined the show too. All females in Flying Moon City started following his news right away.

People were excited, even before the Congregation had officially commenced. The participants literally spelled a different congregation this year.

"Alright, we are going for the dining party," reminded Liu Sheng drowsily. "Yawn... wake me up when we hit main course."

Rui Bing took a look at her invitation, she passed a look of confusion at the little boy. She did not move into Yan family's residence like other participants.

She just got her invitation.

"Go, just go, why won't you go?" laughed the little boy, who somehow had become manager of Rui Bing's fighting career. He seemed pretty passionate about it too. "But remember to tag me along, Sister Bing!" he said as he reached out his fleshy arm.

Huang Jiming also had just received the invitation. Yan family the host did not reckon the sudden participation from both of

them so the invitation got a bit late. Anyway Huang Jiming took a look at the invitation interestingly, he could feel his blood heating up. How could he be not excited when he would be seeing all other experts from their respective fields?

...(Meanwhile)...

"What? Wait, what? Come again? You are going? Excuuuuseee me? They invited me, not you. Look at the name, it says 'Ye Luo', L-U-O, there's no Y-I-N behind." There Ye Luo was, shouting in his room, "They did not invite you, so why are you coming? Huh? Hmm? You would like to follow me? You want to stay by my side at every single moment possible? Do I look not straight enough for you? Please, they might think you are some hobo looking for free food or something. You are still a known celeb alright? So stay royal. What? You don't care? Alright, alright, alright, here's my white flag, just come along. Just pretend you are also invited. Happy?" said Ye Luo helplessly to Ye Yin.

Chapter 422: A Stone's thrown away from...

The host of the Congregation was Yan family this year, and it has been a tradition where there would be a dining party like this before every commencement, you could encounter with fellow participants here to socialize a little since it was a rare opportunity to have experts this many in one hall.

This dining party was the prime event in free space zone, while there was the leader of Yan family and the old lady showing up at the party this year. Certainly the leader of the hosting family was renowned, but the old lady was no simple figure either.

Because of the annual event, Risserd had gathered all sorts of youth talents from every corner, and no doubt the Abductor once showed up and attempted to seize a prey or two.

So what this old lady did was, she allied with the few known forces on Risserd, like Huang family for example, and had wiped out every base of the Abductor on Risserd. The mission was successful, which had won over respect of the people towards the old lady.

She had never joined the dining party before, but somehow this year she decided to show up.

Ye Chong tailed Feng Su obediently. He had to follow at every of her steps since it would be horrible if she had a chance to work on something. He could not help but to shudder even to the slightest thought of Feng Su calling a whole flock of Xi Feng mechs to hunt him down.

But in no time Ye Chong realized how he had just invited trouble himself.

Constant stares came from the other Jie experts at the venue, which raided upon him like an arrow shower. Why the stare? Feng Su did not show up in her veil of course. Her absolute beauty had

been presented to the folks again.

She worked a little harder dressing up herself this time. This fine violet one piece was the finest thread from Yan family upon request. With her dreamy charm, she certainly looked like a blooming violet. Her lovely waists had sketched sexiness with her low and opened collar, as the collarbones breathed in the air, revealing the glossy smooth skin of hers under the gentle light of the hall.

She was not the only woman but she might be the only and also the fairest woman in the room. Those female martial arts practitioners, mentalists, alchemists might have greater skills than her, but they knew nothing about the vibrant life, so it was wholly the duckling to the swam, a strong contrast.

Feng Su had dominated the entire hall with her beauty once again.

Well... because of her superb beauty, Ye Chong felt like that toad on the lily pad nearby... which caused some unidentifiable fury coming from the sightseers... he was feeling uneasy with the constant glares that his back had been soaked wet despite that indifferent expression of his.

Hah! Snorted Feng Su, feeling great as she glanced at Ye Chong. She had been cracking her head finding a way to pressure Ye Chong but she seemed out of luck. Now, all she had to do was to groove in the hall and he would be sweating heavily by the attention, of envy of course.

"Hmm~" With a seductive smile, Feng Su leaned against Ye Chong as she wrapped herself upon him.

At that moment, Ye Chong could feel the army had replaced their ammo to throwing knives, it was no longer an arrow shower of glare, but a raid of thousand knives! His hands even began shivering!

Disdainful snorts and hmphs echoed in the room. If it was not because of their respects towards the host, Ye Chong probably would have been sliced into the cluster of stars.

"Don't play with fire," whispered Ye Chong in a warning tone.

"Hah!" Feng Su giggled as the grip tightened, "Like this?" The entanglement intensified!

"Don't you like it? Hmm?" whispered Feng Su, breathing into Ye Chong's ears.

"Hmph!" snorted Ye Chong.

Feng Su flinched as her head retreated.

It was no ordinary snort. Ye Chong actually performed a Mortal Roar just now, a miniature version of it of course. But Feng Su was pretty close to Ye Chong, so even a miniature version could pack a punch to her.

It was a simple gesture yet fairly identifiable among the Jie experts, Ye Chong then felt the showering attack reduced drastically.

Feng Su then behaved herself as she backed off.

"OH! IF IT WASN'T LIU!"

"YES! IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME SINCE WE'VE MET!"

The hall was spacious, while also being crowded. Greetings of reunion could be heard roaring in the room all the time. They were martial arts practitioners after all, and they sure had a strong diaphragm, they literally enunciated their courtesy, which caused the noises.

"This is a dining party?" Feng Su's expression was dull, well, she was once a somebody of the showbiz in 5 major galaxies and had joined various socialites' party before, but never once she had seen such a messy party.

Tackan and his group had made a wise decision of distancing

themselves from both Ye Chong and Feng Su. It was simply heart burning to see both of them exploding randomly during the event.

Again, Ye Chong, to stay low, had dragged Feng Su all the way to one corner and sat down.

But little did he know that, there was one handsome man observing them.

"Oh my!"

"Is that..."

"Gasp..."

If Feng Su's arrival created the first uproar in the party, then Rui Bing must be the second storm tonight.

Rui Bing, in her white garb, was leading a cute little boy into the hall.

Her chilly charm, tinted with the slight tenacity and the chivalry of a true fighter, had grabbed the attention of the people.

Feng Su might be identified as "seduction" itself but Rui Bing, she would be "ambition", "dream" and "confidence".

Rui Bing walked in as usual, unaffected by the fiasco as to center she walked the boy, who was waving to the Jie experts around shyly.

"Oh my gosh... you're so cute!"

"Let me pinch your face!"

The female Jie experts seemed fairly interested in the puffy boy.

The front suddenly got silent, which made Ye Chong lifting his head in peculiarity, but well, he was at the corner, so he could hardly see a thing. He gave up eventually since he wanted to stay low.

But little he knew that, at a spot a stone's thrown away from him, laid the person he had been searching for ages!

Rui Bing led the little boy to the other corner. Like husband, like wife, Rui Bing was too someone who did not fancy the attention but she did not fear getting involved in something like Ye Chong. Perhaps that was why Ye Chong could somehow accept her for the rest of his life... similarity...

"Would you stop following me like a paparazzi?!" Ye Luo freaked out softly as possible, "Oh my Risserd, people must be thinking we are legally married or something! Why must you be this close? Two steps away from me please, and how many times must I tell you... stop doing that 'I am Ye Yin the Great, bow before me' face! Don't you feel tired doing it all day? Please, greet the other guests upon encounter, courtesy of humanity, we are a family of courtesy after all!" muttered Ye Luo.

And one could see the vein bloating on Ye Yin's forehead.

"Hello there, how are you feeling tonight?"

One guest came to them and Ye Luo had professionally turned into a gentleman, "Well certainly, great, how about you? You look gorgeous tonight."

"Alright, see you at the event itself."

And the guest left, Ye Luo's face collapsed, "I said two steps, nothing more and nothing less! Don't keep the gap too far, you retreat inside your mech at a warfield after all, you're now a tortoise without shell and I could imagine someone smashing you with their feet, man, do you know how martial arts should have led the field and not..."

The veins bloated again!

"Are you Mr. Luo Shi?" asked one serviceman politely.

"Yes, yes I am!" smiled Ye Luo, as transformed into a gentleman again, "What's the matter?"

"The lady is aware of your attendance and would like to have a chat with you." Said the serviceman with an inviting gesture.

"The old lady? Of Yan family?" Ye Luo was confused upon the serviceman's nod. How would the old lady of Yan family know him? He might be a somebody in the galaxy, a handsome somebody, but he did not think he would make an elderly in his seventies a big fan of his...

"The old lady requested me to invite you himself. Please, take this path. I believe everything would make sense after you have met him," said the serviceman with a bow.

Chapter 423: Reunion

Ye Chong rested at one corner silently with Feng Su, who looked tamed like a kitty upon recognizing the fact that more mischiefs would only cause more pain in her.

Her stare wandered upon the surrounding, as panicked she was, knowing that she would be utterly helpless as long as Ye Chong was there. Her expression stayed calm however, and her beauty still attracted a considerable amount of gazes even at the corner.

A handsome man approached them with a friendly smile.

But the hustle of the crowd held his step.

Apparently the head of Yan family and the old lady had showed up at the hall. Ye Chong looked over to the other side, his eyes went soulless upon recognizing that one face...

The host was a total stranger to him, but the old lady... she was the enemy!

Yes, it was the same old lady he spotted on Dankwood, whom the Han family escorted to safety in the midst of chaos.

No wonder the Abductor had eyed her! He had remembered stories about this old lady. Wait, there was somebody else. Ye Luo? Was that Ye Luo? Ye Chong spotted that great man who smiled brightly next to the old lady.

He came?!

Well, Ye Chong soon calmed down, it was just natural to see Ye Luo, the participant of the Congregation last year to be in the same venue this year. He just thought they would not be reuniting anytime soon. Fate was surely capricious.

Ye Luo's eyes turned threatening the moment he spotted that indifferent young man in the crowd. He knew Ye Chong's little camouflage trick and he could see through it, but his perception

changed the moment he saw Feng Su. He quickly withdrew the hostility in his eyes, though his gaze at Ye Chong turned odd.

Ye Yin's expression changed when he identified that smiley man who exchanged gazes with him in the crowd. The man was smiling, yet he could feel the pressure.

They might have put up their act flawlessly but people in the hall were no folk, as other guests could discern the slightest change in atmosphere.

Feng Su too sensed the atmosphere as she shifted her focus to the two men between the crowd. She looked at Ye Yin, then the smiling man, she flinched.

Similarly, Ye Chong, as he looked into the crowd, flinched too.

Feng Su was surprised of Ye Chong's reaction since that was the first ever shudder she ever saw on him. What had made him shudder?

Ye Chong froze at the corner, as his eyes fixed upon that white waving silhouette.

The little boy would like to see the old lady and the head of Yan family, as Rui Bing led him to the front.

She glanced across the crowd and suddenly she stopped. The little boy felt strange, as sensed the inertia, he shook her hands a few times but Rui Bing remained frozen on the ground.

He lifted his head, just to be shocked of Rui Bing's expression.

Two fresh streams of tears rolled off her pale cheeks, as her empty gaze fixed afar.

The little boy wanted to say something but his pendant was buzzing.

The atmosphere turned more intense.

The experts evacuated themselves soon after they confirmed the change in atmosphere, while the old lady had been led to the

corner as well.

After the place had been cleared out, they realized the situation was not simple as they had assumed.

There was not one, but two pairs of exchanging gazes.

Ye Yin versus Huang Jiming, the angry vs the smiley.

Ye Chong to Rui Bing, the speechless vs the tearing.

Ye Chong had never experienced such sensation before. Something was occurring in him upon seeing Rui Bing in tears, and he once thought he had a heart of ice.

The little boy had expressed the calmness not of his age, as he recognized the strange man at the opposite upon perceiving Sister Bing's expression.

He might have put up a camouflage, but he was still Sister Bing's partner.

Feng Su distanced away from Ye Chong quietly.

Ye Chong no longer sensed the surroundings. His senses became numb, the noises gradually faded away with the silhouettes of people. His alertness was toned down as he only saw that white garbed lady with that pair of teary eyes.

Safe. Feng Su had sneaked to Huang Jiming's side.

"Wow, I never knew there would be drama..."

"It's the Congregation, the big shots always have all sorts of business going on in the dark." The crowd whispered as they looked at the 7 people at the center. The 7 people certainly had something fishy going on together, especially after a few guests had identified Rui Bing and Huang Jiming, the two sudden challengers at the center. And there was Feng Su, the pretty yet deadly Jie expert, Ye Luo the trusted fighter by the old lady, along with the few unknown experts there. All casts had arrived, the camera should be rolling.

"Hmm... I have seen that young man somewhere before...", muttered the old lady as she pointed at Ye Chong. "Send the men to investigate everyone at the center, fast!" Ordered the head of Yan family as immediately caught on the old lady's gesture.

"And I thought I'll never meet you again. This is pretty exhilarating if you ask me," initiated Huang Jiming, with his signature bright smile, though his tone was grim.

"Right...", replied Ye Yin, with an indescribable bloodlust and a stoned expression of his. "It's been three years eh... since our last encounter."

Ye Luo nearly dropped his jaws as in confusion he poked Ye Yin a few times, "W-who is he? Your enemy? But I had never heard of this? When did you have an enemy?" Well, Ye Luo was a horrible pilot anyway, so he never had the chance to face an opponent like Huang Jiming. Furthermore he did things with fists rather than the mechanical handle, so he was not aware that Huang Jiming, the smiley man before him, was one of the top 3 legends.

"I'll say we are more like rivals," corrected Ye Yin gravely.

"Hah!" Laughed Huang Jiming, "I like your choice of word!"

Ye Luo could not resist but to flatten his lips.

Oh? So you're playing the deep game with me now? Ugh.

He thought as he looked at Ye Chong.

Wait a sec.

He looked at Huang Jiming whom Feng Su stood next to, then back to Ye Chong where Rui Bing was standing opposite to.

The covetousness struck him, as he sprinted to Ye Chong, "Oh my, so that's your Lady Luck eh? Tsk, tsk, tsk, I mean, Ladies* Luck. That explains why I never have such luck. By the way, which one is your... you know... the one and only?"

Ye Chong promptly raised his finger upon Rui Bing, "Her."

Ye Chong's little gesture of indirect confession came as a heavy blow at Rui Bing, as she dropped her head. Her tears had stopped, seemingly evaporated due to the heat building up on her cheeks. Rui Bing had always been demonstrating the mighty side of her, being a Jie expert; but only when Ye Chong was there, Rui Bing would reveal that little girl inside.

But well, Ye Luo had just spoiled the moment.

"Man, brother, I must say, how could you be a two-timer when your son is already this old?" said Ye Luo as he pointed at the little boy next to Rui Bing.

If it was not because of the location, Rui Bing would have fired something from her sleeves.

"Well, well, well, it's been three years, time sure flies huh...," muttered Huang Jiming. "I wonder if Mr. Ye had lost his skills, I feel eager to try..."

"Try me," replied Ye Yin firmly.

Ye Yin walked towards the exit without a single thought and Huang Jiming followed him with a smile. Feng Su hurriedly went after the smiley man.

The little boy's pendant was vibrating so vigorously that even Ye Chong could begin hearing the buzzes.

"What is that?" Ye Chong took a look, and he almost collapsed, "Mu/Shang!" He recognized the pendant, it was the dimensional keystone of Mu/Shang. Certainly it had to be! Even if he turned blind, he would know it upon touch.

He ran towards the little boy and was going for that reunion, but then he realized at closer look, that it was not Mu/Shang's dimensional keystone. The pendant did have very similar appearance as the keystone, not only design but also the texture. The difference... well, he could see it now, there were different patterns on the surface.

"Brother Ye, you know Brah?" asked the little boy in bewilderment, "Who's Mu/Shang?"

The pendant vibrated harder!

"Sister Bing, Brother Ye... we should be going outside. Brah wants to walk..."

Ye Chong grabbed the little boy up by his collars, as he held Rui Bing's hand tightly.

Rui Bing's heart was warm, as she quickly seized that powerful hand of the one she loved. She would not want to lose it again, the very treasure of her life.

Ye Chong exchanged glances with Rui Bing, he made a tip with his toes and he zoomed to the outside. In the wind the little boy struggled, "No... I want Sister Bing. I'm calling for child abuse!" The pendant vibrated in specific rhythm, seemingly protesting for the boy as well.

A battle was happening and Ye Chong decided to treat that protest with ignorance.

Feng Su was following that smiley man. Ye Chong would presume that he was from the Xi Feng tribe. On the other hand, Ye Luo and that cold-blooded man seemed to be in one team too, he must be from Ye family.

Then, a battle must be happening, judging from their exchange, a battle from the past.

Ye family versus the Xi Feng tribe.

How could one miss it?

Chapter 424: The Staring Contest

The two were already at their positions when Ye Chong finally left the building.

Ye Chong whispered, "Where's my bag?" And Rui Bing passed him his bag right away. Ever since Ye Chong had disappeared, Rui Bing had been taking great care of the bag.

The first thing to do would be to take out Han Jia's dimensional keystone. Ye Chong still had Moon King with him but that was not truly his own mech after all. It might be a better model than Han Jia, but Ye Chong felt greater potency with Han Jia.

The two men were standing 50 meters apart. Huang Jiming had Feng Su at his side, while Ye Yin still had Ye Luo right next to him. Ye Luo insisted on staying because he reckoned that person being one major pain to Ye family. Ye Yin was the top pilot of the family, and this man was able to make Ye Yin this agitated, surely the man had something up his sleeves.

"Wait, I remember now...", whispered Rui Bing with a soft cry, "I knew that woman. She's the one who kidnapped me to He Yue!" Rui Bing finally recognized Feng Su. She did not hate Feng Su for the wrongdoing however. If it was not for her, Rui Bing would never meet Ye again. She felt like thanking Feng Su too. Well, it was not like Rui Bing had a bad time entirely with Feng Su. Rui Bing could not help but to smile when she remembered the mischief she had done to Feng Su before.

To be honest, Feng Su also recognized Rui Bing immediately, but she was too busy to have a personal reunion at the moment as she was standing next to this man who was once her idol, being the strongest in He Yue, and now fighting against that cold man at the opposite. She knew the cold man, it was clear, crystal-clear.

The world's biggest collision. Ye Yin versus Huang Jiming, happening soon...

She thought of joining the battle but her mech was still with that indifferent young man who was too busy holding his wife's hand. Technically she would be useless in a fight without her mech. She did improve on her strength recently but that was not enough to face the brawny Ye family. Moreover Ye Chong was there too, his wife was also an obstacle she had to overcome before she could even touch her keystone.

The will to battle burned high in both parties. They could no longer hold onto anything else. Being a Jie expert, the top fighters in the galaxy, the world might be able to limit them even if there were not much things they would truly care, but obviously the free space zone was called "free" not without a reason.

If Feng Su was fighting, she might have a moment of consideration on the effect of deploying her mech in a primitive zone like the free space zone. Both Ye Yin and Huang Jiming did not care, however.

Simultaneously both deployed their own mech!

And that was when Ye Chong first witnessed the two mechs of the topmost hierarchy in the field!

Ye Yin's mech stood about 10 meters tall, with a polished surface glossing in complete black that did not feel metallic at all. Its streamlined body looked like "speed" itself with its undersized yet vicious appearance. The elbows and the knees were installed with spikes, while the body and limbs were covered in armors of fitting design. Ye Chong was smart enough to see the trickery behind the design, as those pieces of armor could form a perfect shield when combined. Something seemed off nevertheless. Ye Chong could not identify its weapons. Did he not install one then? No way. Declined Ye Chong his speculation in his mind. Any melee model must have a kind of weapon in spite of its exceptional quality. He must have hidden it somewhere.

Huang Jiming's mech was also beyond his perception. It was a

mech in fainting green, of height slightly taller than Ye Yin's mech - about 12 meters approximately, with a body adorned by all sorts of feather engravings that glowed in emerald like the viridescent stars twinkling on one night. Ye Chong speculated that those engravings must have a certain type of contribution in the battle. Unlike the other winged mechs in Xi Feng tribe, this mech had no wings. Instead, it had a bundle of 7 plumes, which extended into the air, fluttering in life. It felt like the tail of the Phoenix. Its short weapons were the two Awlbills, which acted similarly like the beak of a bird that pierced the enemies. For long-ranged weapon... Ye Chong had not found it.

This was Ye Chong's first time of encountering an incomprehensible mech. It was his lucky day probably, for he met two strange mechs at once.

Right when Ye Chong was exclaiming at the design of those mechs, the pendant beeped again...

That was when the third mech showed up in the sky.

The mech had a snow white main body, a pure mechanical design due to its every part being diagonal. It seemed pretty tough with a stern face in which the mechanical eyes beeped rhythmically in blue. The sky blue stripes were the addition to the minimalistic design, which gave it a sense of grace. The two mechanical arms were holding a giant sky blue ray gun.

Even though Ye Chong was known to be an illiterate in ranged weaponry, Mu/Shang's education had bestowed him the sensitive sensibility on ray-based shooters. And no doubt, he could not control his breath the moment he spotted that gun. He did not know the exact model but the weapon just shouted deadly to him. The barrel was much longer than what he normally saw, while there was a complex-looking optic above. It should guarantee at least accuracy. The additional barrel below should serve a different function but Ye Chong did not have a hunch on it. Right on the mech's left arm there rested a plasma shield activator, which

clearly was installed for blocking attacks.

Other than the weapon, the mech gave Ye Chong a fairly strong déjà vu for some reason. It resembled Mu/Shang somehow... though at most details they were different.

The debut of this uninvited guest was certainly astounding.

"Brahmara!?" shouted both Ye Yin and Huang Jiming together, their faces turned pale instantly. They glanced at each other, then they sprinted towards their own mech respectively.

Brahmara visited the world from above. It did not perform an attack, rather it did a quick dive, all the way to the ground and landed before the little boy.

The mech stood before them, looking solemn and threatening.

The mech placed down its mechanical left hand. The little boy beamed at Ye Chong and Rui Bing, as he lifted his tiny step over the palm, "Sister Bing, Brother Ye, I'm getting onto Brah. I'll be going, if you would excuse me." And there he was lifted to his cabin. The gate opened and he clumsily rolled in, after waving at the two stunned adults.

Brahmara?

Did the two men say Brahmara?

Ye Chong was pretty sure he heard the name. Cold sweats dripped off his chin. Although it came unexpectedly, he finally knew who the third legend was...

"Put on your mech," instructed Rui Bing.

And Ye Chong deployed Han Jia immediately!

The beautiful butterfly was reintroduced to the audience. Ironically, the audience turned out to be the legendary pilots in He Yue this time!

Ye Yin, Ye Chong, Huang Jiming got into their respective cabin almost at the same timing.

Whether to join the battle, Rui Bing did not hesitate, as she promptly deployed the Guardian. As long as Ye Chong was in there, nothing should be hesitated.

Han Jia was looking frail in front of the three giants of history, that it might be blown to the other corner of the galaxy upon a group applause from its foes. The mech of Ye family was fearsome, the mech of Xi Feng tribe was refreshing, the mech of Xue Lai clan was sturdy yet graceful. On this stage, Han Jia was exuding a different kind of beauty, while the Guardian had also a unique charm with its brilliant gold as it sat on Han Jia's shoulders.

Feng Su and Ye Luo? They would be at the spectator's seats this time, since Ye Chong had their mechs. "Are we watching this?" Both of them exchanged glances. And the next second, they were no longer within the sight, as they had scurried for their lives.

You got to be kidding me! These mechs could easily demolish the entire Flying Moon City! And you asked me if I'm staying to watch?

They seriously hoped they had wings so that they could flee in time.

The other guests were absolutely stupefied.

"Wait!" And finally one man regained his senses, "Outsider! They are the outsider!" he screamed, as the key term unfroze the silence.

The head of Yan family stared at these monsters in dismay.

Ye Chong and his foes did not have the leisure to entertain these primitives as they zapped into the sky.

Battle Station!

The armor at the waists of Ye Yin's mech suddenly slid upwards, revealing the cartridge inside, from which 17 pieces of Spikedrops flew out and began revolving about its body like a school of black swimming fishes.

Huang Jiming's glowing engravings shone glaringly out of

sudden as the 7 plumes collected, forming a layered stack blooming like flower, as a guard to its weak spots. The concealed chamber had been opened, the mech was ready to fire, as the mech armed itself with the Awlbills.

The gun of Brahmara had performed an analyzed lock-on. At this location, through this angle, the fired rays would hit on anybody in the shortest time possible. The plasma shield had been equipped, as the plasma particles flocked in curvy outline at the edge.

Ye Chong was ready. The 12 tentacles had been disengaged from Han Jia's colorful wings. The daggers had been withdrawn while the wings were fluttering as a kind of warmup.

Rui Bing was all set. The Guardian kneed slightly on Han Jia's shoulder, ready to launch itself at any second.

Chapter 425: Mayday! Mayday!

Inside the cabin of Han Jia, Ye Chong was having cold sweats all over his body. His face was pale as he stared at the flickering digital snow on the hologram.

He could not see a thing out there.

Such electromagnetic interference! Han Jia's detection system had been impaired... Ye Chong briskly changed to Photon detection optic. Although such mode offered a narrower scope of vision projected in a lower resolution, at least he could discern something at the outside! It was his only choice!

"Can you see them?" asked Ye Chong in the channel.

"I can... but...," Rui Bing responded, "It looks foreign to me. There are many lines... in different directions and the mech with a tail has the most lines..." she said slowly as she tried making out the strange view she got.

Ye Chong shifted the camera to Huang Jiming's mech.

So that is what those engravings are for!

Ye Chong was shocked while also finally recognizing the situation upon view.

Meanwhile, the opponents were similarly surprised.

Skeleton mech? Miniature mech? Those were certainly not the standard models both Ye Yin and Huang Jiming could see everyday. They were well-informed of the capability of a skeleton mech, but the miniature mech... "So the mech was with the boy the whole time..." whispered Huang Jiming. They knew the origin of this technological masterpiece by Gu Shaoze. All aristocrats were intrigued by his newest craft as they set up strong surveillance around him, but Mu made a lucky crash. Eventually, every member of the aristocrats died. Nobody survived other than Gu Shaoze and Number Two.

But after they left Ye Chong, the pair of misfortune still encountered their second crisis, the MPA. In the battle, Number Two met her demise from protecting Gu Shaoze who showed strong resistance in handing over the mech.

The MPA intended to take him back to the base under escort, but they bumped into the spaceship of Fred the Great. Under the conflict, Ye Chong forced himself into the warship and discovered the fainted brilliance. Gu Shaoze, breathing the final few bit of his soul, passed the Guardian to him at last.

The aristocrats acknowledged the existence of the Guardian, even the specifications of it, as they would receive reports of the mech from time to time. And after the few escapes Ye Chong made using the Guardian, they were convinced and started to reevaluate its capabilities.

The anti-detection ability of both skeleton mech and the Guardian was a shocker to the 3 legends.

They had also switched to Photon mode detection.

The 5 mechs hovered in the air, anticipating the big battle.

But no one dared to make the first move.

It was a landmine, silent yet lethal, blowing up upon touch.

Huang Jiming, Ye Yin and Brahmara knew each other well. They were at a similar level in battle and would only wound each other in the end if they fought.

In addition, there was a skeleton mech with unknown skills and an unforeseeable Guardian mech. They could not imagine how both of them would make a joint attack and how strong the attack would be.

The 3 legends might be the top pilots from their respective families, but certainly they would not be initiating a war on a whim.

Any move from the mech would trigger something major now, not even the slightest gesture should be allowed.

It would be a pure disastrous chaos once a bullet got fired.

Sigh...

Huang Jiming and Ye Yin were feeling dull, since they presumed a quick and fearless fight against each other at first but the sudden participation of Brahmara killed the fun, not to mention the other 2 mechs hovering nearby.

They discarded the thoughts of an one-on-one at last. This was because anyone who initiated the fight would clearly be the punching bag for the others. Literally, nobody in He Yue galaxy could ever survive the chained attack by any four of those mechs. The first to move would be the first to go.

None of them dared to flee too. Their back would probably be shot if any of them decided to turn back and run away.

The 5 mechs remained still.

"Brah, let's team up with Sister Bing and Brother Ye," said the little boy childishly.

"Identity: Unknown. Judgement: Not Possible." The machine beeped emotionlessly.

"It's alright. They are good friends. How about you try connecting them... I can talk," said the little boy to the projection.

"Negative. Proposition: Rejected as unreasonable."

"It would really work! Come on!" said the little boy in agitation.

"Order from the leader: Your safety is the priority," said Brahmara firmly.

"Leader, the tribe leader, you always throw this excuse to me! Who care about the leader! Brah you sometimes are just bad!" muttered the boy in an unsatisfied tone. He got up but he sat back obediently at last.

If only Ye Chong could see the setup in the cabin, he would be jumping in amazement. The hydraulic suspension system was of royalty. Probably that was the reason why Brahmara would have the little boy inside the body.

"This is getting boring. Keep standing there guys, I'm taking a nap," mumbled the little boy with a disappointed look, as he lay down. The seat was large and as comfy as a bed.

The hologram dimmed slowly as a soft lullaby played inside the cabin. In no time the boy began snoring as joining the sheeps at the ranch in his dream.

Well, meanwhile, nobody was enjoying the same leisure he had.

They remained still for the next 3 hours.

It surely was consuming for them to remain at high alarms for such a long time. Brahmara had the advantages of automatic judgement intelligence but it would consume much more energy than the other models.

The guests on the ground were finding the giant crafts strange in the air. Being naturally the residents of the free space zone, the foreign mechs were enough to distress the alarm and summon the army to kill the outsiders. These outsiders were in the sky now nonetheless, so these Jie experts could only watch them.

The guests were not the least entertained few. Ye Luo and Feng Su were feeling worse as their respective families would be having a massive war in no time and all they could do was exchanging glances since their mechs were not with them.

Staring at the projection with full focus, Ye Chong felt his stamina draining quickly.

Out of the blue, the dimensional keystone of Moon King vibrated on his wrist.

The vibration, again? He received the same vibration when Ye family sent Ye Luo the order to escort him home.

What kind of order had arrived this time?

Ye Chong gave a quick glance at other mechs. He prompted the keystone interface after making sure that there would not be any move for the next few seconds.

"Mayday! Mayday! The pathway to free space zone is under attack by unknown force! I repeat the pathway is under attack! All battle units are required to head for assistance! All battle units are required to head for assistance! Coordination would be given! Emergency! Emergency!"

Ye Chong quickly switched the interface off after viewing the distress call.

Little did he know that, the other pilots had received a similar call as well. Unlike Ye Chong's indifference, their faces paled right away. Even Brahmara had turned on the alarm to wake the boy up in shock.

Unlike Ye Chong, they all knew the message behind this call!

The pathway was specifically the connection between He Yue and the free space zone. There were 3 pathways in general, under the ownership of the three aristocrats respectively, while these pathways were the only connection to the world outside. One may argue that Ye Chong had walked a different way before and the galaxy was boundless, but Ye Chong managed to survive only because of his protagonist's luck, any folk could have died walking down his way.

Assuming all top pilots received the similar call, viewing from a bigger picture, all three pathways were under attack. The aristocrats valued these pathways so they were under great guard by the families' own men. It should not have a problem but the pilots were receiving the distress signal. The guardsmen were losing! What else would that mean?

They could already imagine how furious the invasion was!

Once they lost the pathway, they lost the way home!

Something strange then happened in the free space zone.

Countless mechs were seen launching into the sky one after another. In less than 3 minutes, the entire sky above Flying Moon City had been crowded by over 300 mechs. The experts on the ground were looking pale, as no one would have expected such an enormous technological force hiding in the dark.

The 300 mechs soon moved into their respective team.

"I would assume that all of you have heard the call. We'll hold this fight at the moment. It's time to go, it's an emergency after all. Now if you would excuse me," initiated Huang Jiming. His friendly tone now sounded hectic as he piloted his mech zooming into Xi Feng's team.

Ye Yin and Brahmara said nothing as they flew to their respective team.

The ground began shaking, the ground shattered as three spaceships emerged! They flew and joined the hovering team accordingly.

To face the unknown danger, the three aristocrats had summoned all forces they had hidden within the free space zone over the years.

And on other planets in free space zone, countless mechs had blasted off into the air too. They went into the giant spaceship, left the planet and came to the main army in intense acceleration.

All bit of strength was collecting gradually.

And Ye Chong was seeing an empty sky before him.

He was bewildered. Something did seem to have happened... should he move?

On second thought, maybe not. Whatever that was happening to the three aristocrats had nothing to do with him.

But then, while everyone was being unaware, the change had come.

It really had come without forewarning.

Chapter 426: Disorder

Poor Feng Su. Huang Jiming had left in a hurry, and did not seem to consider her situation. Without her mech, she did not know what was happening. However, seeing so many mechs rising into the sky, she knew that something important must have happened. Ye Luo was also in a similar position as her.

The sudden departure of the Three Aces allowed Ye Chong to finally relax. He did not know what had happened, but it had served to defuse the current situation. These three mechs must be the most advanced mechs in the universe, and they left a very deep impression in Ye Chong. He was still awed by the machines. Compared to those three mechs, Han Jia was like a glorified piece of trash. Aside from the skeletal material and engine, Han Jia was surpassed by the three mechs in all respects.

For the first time ever, Ye Chong felt a sense of jealousy. No mech pilot would be exempted from this reaction upon seeing those three mechs.

However, this was obviously not the time to stare into space. Ye Chong took a glance at the fierce looking Congregation experts below, and began to think about how to leave the place.

Feng Su was about to leave when Han Jia, carrying Guardian, swooped down to meet Ye Luo and Feng Su. Without time to properly introduce each other, the two mechs carried one person each and went back into the skies.

In fact, Ye Chong had took everyone along a huge turnaround and returned to Flying Moon City. They quietly slipped into Rui Bing's place. When Old Jalopy, Fei Si and the rest saw Ye Chong and Rui Bing, they were pleasantly surprised.

After the initial joy of reunion, Ye Chong quickly asked Ye Luo about the emergency beacon he received.

Ye Luo and Feng Su finally realized what had happened. Both of them paled instantly.

"How's that possible?" Ye Luo looked distressed and in disbelief. "How's that possible? The military strength at the Gateway is formidable!"

Feng Su was quiet, but also looked like she could not quite believe what had happened.

Seeing the lack of reaction in Ye Chong, Ye Luo explained, "You probably don't know about this, but the defense in place at the Gateway is very strong. If something happened to the Gateway, the Tribes people in the free space zone will be unable to go back. That's why the Gateway was guarded heavily ever since it was created. Emergency beacons are only released when the situation is very dire. Once the beacon is received, any and all personnel must rush to the Gateway as soon as possible. Heavens! What could possibly have happened?"

Ye Luo's explanation cleared away the mysteriousness of the situation for everyone else not in the know.

"Who did this?" Ye Luo thought hard about it, knitting his brows together. "Who would have such power? Could it be Gray Valley?" In He Yue Galaxy, the only force that would dare to challenge the prowess of the Three Aristocratic Families is the mysterious Gray Valley.

"Impossible," Feng Su replied plainly but sure of herself. As everyone looked to her, she continued, "The Gateway is too narrow, and cannot support large troop deployment. Besides, a great number of combat units are assigned to guard the Gateway, with a huge number of support units nearby. Even if it's Gray Valley, they can't possibly enter the Gateway."

"That's right. The entrance is so narrow, you can't have large troops going in. How did they arrive here?" Ye Luo agreed upon hearing her analysis.

"Are there other ways to enter the Gateway?" Ye Chong interrupted.

Ye Luo and Feng Su exchanged a glance and replied in unison, "There are none!"

Ye Luo added, "To create the Gateway in the first place, the Three Aristocratic Families had each exhausted a huge amount of manpower and resources. The space around the Gateway is unstable, and dangerous to travel. All these years, this area around the Gateway is still largely understudied."

Feng Su suddenly had a terrible realization. She looked horrified as she said, "We've forgotten something! The Gateway is too small for large troop mobilization. That means we cannot hope to receive support from He Yue."

As she finished her sentence, everyone looked even more distressed.

Sensing the growing tension around them, Ye Luo managed a laugh and said, "Don't worry, our forces in the free space zone are powerful. Besides, the Three Aces are all here. It shouldn't be a problem to secure the Gateway."

Ye Luo's words comforted them all to a certain degree. It was true that the Three Aces were all here, so there was nothing to worry about. Ye Chong was still pondering on what Ye Luo and Feng Su had both said, and felt that the situation might not be so simple.

He Yue Galaxy was truly plunged into a state of disorder.

News of the attack on the Gateway had reached the Three Aristocratic Families as fast as physically possible. Now, all three families were in a panic! Not only were the Three Aces all in the free space zone, Xue Lai Clan's only son and the Ye Family's son, Ye Luo were also there. Besides, there were many other of their own people in the free space zone. If they really met an unfortunate fate, it would be a loss that the Three Aristocratic Families cannot

possibly recover from!

The sudden attack brought about a sense of danger that the Three Aristocratic Families had never felt before.

Emergency rescue efforts were immediately made!

All three Families deployed their military forces in a scale that was unprecedented. All their bases of operations also received orders to operate in their highest alert level.

Tension spread across the entire He Yue Galaxy like wildfire. As the military forces of the Three Aristocratic Families were mobilized, the other forces in He Yue reacted accordingly. For the moment, He Yue Galaxy was in a state of chaos.

The Ye Family's Patriarch read the reports of the battlefield with a look of distress. The Gateway was too narrow, and could not fit in their large troops. As they mobilized squadron by squadron into the Gateway, none of them returned. Until now, they had no idea who was inside. The Gateway was like a black hole, swallowing anything that entered it.

Xi Feng Tribe's Chieftain and Xue Lai Clan's Clan Leader received the same reports. Of course, they were also similarly distressed by it.

Ye Chong and his company left Flying Moon City as soon as they could manage. Since their identities as outsiders were uncovered, it would be dangerous to stay any longer.

The group reached a valley not far from Flying Moon City.

Ye Luo led the group and explained quietly to Ye Chong, "This is one of the Ye Family's base of operations. I've been here before. The local combat troops must have all been deployed, but the transport division is probably still here. We'll tag along with the transport division and meet up with Ye Yin. That way, we'll find out what's going on. Hmm, don't worry, he won't recognize you from your looks right now. I won't tell on you. It's safer to return

to He Yue Galaxy. The free space zone is a good place, but not one that's suitable for you."

Ye Chong nodded in assent. If Ye Luo wanted to expose his disguise, he would have done so long ago. While he only knew Ye Luo for a short while, Ye Chong found himself oddly trusting of the man. The two of them were ahead of the group, and their exchanged whispers were not noticed by the people at the back.

Ye Luo had been here before, so the people at the base recognized him. Ye Luo's position in the Ye Family was high, and since his father was the Patriarch, people here paid him respect. With his presence, Ye Chong and company were not questioned, but were instead cordially received.

The base was full of activity. Various engineering mechs made their ways across the base, moving energy cells and other combat resources, or doing final checks on their starship.

"Luo!" The person in charge of the base, Ye Pang, was a childhood friend of Ye Luo's. Ye Pang looked like a refined man. He wore frameless spectacles and well ironed clothing, looking like a gentleman. He was relieved to see Ye Luo. "Wonderful! You're alright! I was worried about you, that something might have happened to you."

Ye Luo laughed. "Hehe, what could possibly happen to me, no one's a match for me! It's not easy to get rid of me!"

Ye Pang raised his brows at him and said, "With your lousy mech piloting skills, you won't need an enemy to defeat you, you'll probably just crash into a wall all by yourself."

Ye Luo had nothing to say to that.

Ye Pang took a sweeping glance at the people around Ye Luo, and did not ask him about them. He understood his childhood friend well. Ye Luo may seem like a careless fool, but he was actually smart and sensible.

"What's the situation?" Ye Luo asked. Everyone looked to Ye Pang, for this was the question that was on the top of their minds.

Ye Pang shook his head. "Don't know yet. We just received the emergency beacon here. I don't know what's going on too. We are packing up as fast as we can, and will be ready to leave in another five hours."

"Pang, you're always the smartest of us all. What do you think of the situation?" Ye Luo looked at Ye Pang with concern.

Ye Pang pushed his spectacles up with his index finger and said lowly, "That truth is, I'm not very optimistic about the situation. Our forces in the free space zone are too scattered, and it takes time to gather them together. What we need the most now is time. I don't know what happened at the Gateway, but the situation must have reached a critical level. I fear ..." Ye Pang did not continue.

"Fear what?" Ye Luo asked quickly.

Ye Pang looked pained. "I fear that by the time we arrived, it will already be too late!"

Everyone went silent at that.

Ye Luo managed a smile and said, "You exaggerate, Pang. You must be wrong this time. The Gateway is guarded by six mech squads in total, how could they be beaten so quickly?"

"Well, I hope so." Ye Pang said softly.

"Pang, who do you think is attacking us? I can't make head nor tails of it." Ye Luo scratched his head in puzzlement.

Ye Pang shook his head. "I don't know that as well. But I'm certain that it's not someone from He Yue or the free space zone. I've done the math. Taking the Gateway by force will require at least the strength of 20 mech squads. Besides, I still haven't figured out how they managed to enter the Gateway without being noticed."

Everyone went silent again.

Ye Pang finally broke the silence. "Everyone, please follow Luo onto the starship for now. I have my duties to attend to, and cannot accompany you all, please forgive me!"

The group thanked him profusely. Ye Pang smiled gently at them and turned away, his eyes lingering on Feng Su only for a moment longer before he returned to his duties.

Chapter 427: Attack

Five hours later, the starship was ready to leave. Ye Chong and his company were on Darvill, the same ship that Ye Pang was on. Darvill was loaded with plenty of energy cells and other war resources.

Ye Pang invited everyone to the bridge. Since this was a transport ship, the bridge was quite spacious. As the starship began its steady flight, most of the crew could now leave to rest, leaving behind only a skeleton crew to operate the ship. However, no one was in the mood to sleep. This was the first time since the Gateway was opened for an emergency beacon to be received. Everyone was nervous, and people could be seen gathering everywhere around the ship, discussing the incident with worried looks.

Ye Pang looked completely different from earlier. He wore a smart looking black uniform, with a leaf emblem sewn on the collar and on each sleeve. The beret on his head made him look like a military officer.

"Why'd you wear this?" Ye Luo could not help but ask as he saw Ye Pang, and even commented, "You look ridiculous!"

Ye Pang took off his beret and threw it onto his desk. He glanced at Ye Luo and said, "You're still as ignorant as before! It is a rule of the Family for any division to be combat ready whenever an emergency beacon is received. We are now combat ready! Do you understand? It's going to be a waste of time explaining this to you, you probably don't remember any of the rules anymore."

Ye Luo was speechless at that.

"What would all of you like to have?" Ye Pang smiled at the rest and said, "Make yourselves at home. I'm from the logistics division, so we still have the good stuff here."

Ye Luo grinned at Ye Chong and said, "The man's got everything."

Just let him know what you'd like to eat and drink."

However, no one was in the mood to consider their meal preferences, and simply asked for the host to decide for them.

Ye Pang noticed their mood. He summoned a subordinate and whispered a few orders. The subordinate left quickly, and soon returned with a tray of snow white cups. The golden liquid in the cups had a very strong and pleasant aroma. Everyone felt refreshed by the smell.

"Solarnimbus Soup! You sure know how to indulge!" Ye Luo took one of the cups eagerly and downed it all in one gulp.

Ye Pang was horrified to see the way Ye Luo finished his drink. "Drink it slowly, this isn't plain water! What a waste to offer you this!"

Ye Chong took a cup and sipped. A strong taste permeated every corner in his mouth, with a slight sharpness that was refreshing. His stomach warmed up, and he felt as though all the hair follicles on his skin were stimulated. It was so comfortable that it made him want to sigh in pleasure.

Solarnimbus Soup was one of Risserd's cuisine specialty. It was a rare product, and only people like the Yan Family and Huang Family could afford to have a bit of them every year. Who knew how Ye Pang got his!

For the moment, everyone indulged in their drinks quietly, and the bridge fell silent.

Ye Pang rested his chin on his hands, his head lowered in thought.

"Our journey will take approximately six days. However, I believe that the combat troops ahead of us would reach the Gateway about three days ahead of us. That means we will receive news of the situation in three days. By then, I believe we will have a better understanding of what's happening," Ye Pang explained slowly.

Later events proved that Ye Pang's estimations were accurate.

On the third day, they received news from the frontlines.

However, the news brought a gloom over everyone's mood. More precisely, they had received an order from the people ahead of them, directing all transport ships to a specified rendezvous point. Nevertheless, together with the order was a summary of the events that unfolded these last few days, the one thing that everyone was worried about.

Ye Yin and the others were defeated in their first wave of attack! Everyone was shocked by the news. Ye Yin was almost like a God to many in the Ye Family. No one expected him to ever lose!

However, the attacker of the Gateway was also identified.

It was a kind of unknown lifeform, and they came in large numbers. They attacked viciously, and were terribly aggressive. From the reports, it was still difficult to ascertain the nature of this lifeform.

In their first contact, the attack of the unknown lifeforms had surprised all those present. If Ye Yin had not grasped the situation quickly and ordered for a swift retreat, they would have suffered a lot more casualties. Nevertheless, in their brief first encounter, the Ye Family had lost 300 mechs, a total of 300 mech pilots.

Every Ye Family member on the transport ship was scared and concerned. How could the Ye Family be so defenseless? When was the last time the Ye Family had suffered so many casualties? 300 staff mech pilots were a formidable force, no matter how one looked at it.

Ye Yin had decided to retreat for the moment, consolidate all their combat forces, and prepare for the next attack. Hence, he had ordered for all combatants and transport ships to rendezvous at the specified location.

"Ye Yin you useless fool!" Ye Luo cried out loud. 300 Ye Family

members were dead, just like that. As a Ye Family member himself, how could he not feel pained?

Ye Pang took a long exhale, opened his eyes, and shook his head, disagreeing with Ye Luo. "Ye Yin made the right decision. This unknown lifeform must be very powerful for Ye Yin to act so passively."

Just then, a sharp alarm came on in the ship!

"All crew members at your stations, all crew members at your stations! Unknown lifeform detected approaching the ship at high speed!" The monitoring officer's voice came through, trembling with fear.

Everyone was caught off guard. It was like a bomb was set off in the ship.

Ye Pang stood up quickly and headed for the bridge. Ye Chong and the others followed him.

In the bridge, Ye Pang looked calm and steady. This managed to soothe the panicking atmosphere in the bridge.

"What happened?" Ye Pang asked in a low voice.

"Captain, please ... please look at this!" The monitoring officer put on a video feed on the largest holographic screen in the bridge.

On the holographic screen, against the dark background of outer space, a small swarm of unknown lifeforms were heading towards them.

Ye Chong had never seen them before. Each of them was like a sphere, enclosed with purplish black armor plates, with an eye on each plate. It was an eerie looking lifeform. The eight purplish black spheres flew in a straight line across the dark space at high speed.

Just then, the unknown lifeforms seemed to have noticed their starship as well. On the holographic screen, each sphere extended

its body from its balled up state, revealing a long, flat body. The sides of the body were lined with horrific looking blades. On the head of each creature were two large feelers.

These lifeforms directed their course towards the ship.

Ye Pang suddenly frowned . "Check their speed!"

"They're ... They're at Mach 15!" The monitoring officer stuttered. Ye Pang's expression turned grim instantly. The rest of them were all still finding it hard to believe.

How fast was Mach 15? Shockingly, terrifyingly fast! In fact, there were hardly any mechs that could achieve this speed. Starships, on the other hand, fared much worse, especially one like their transport ship.

These unknown lifeforms were rapidly approaching their starship.

On the holographic screen, it was even possible for everyone to see the slight vibrations of the two feelers on the foreheads of these creatures.

"Could it be?" Ye Pang muttered to no one in particular.

The seven creatures stopped their approach about 20 kilometers away from Darvill, and began to circle around the ship.

Ye Pang could no longer keep his composure, looking even more grim. "This is bad! They must be scouts of some kind!"

"What do we do?" Ye Luo was already panicking like mad.

"Sigh, we can do nothing. We have no combatants onboard this ship. All combatants were already deployed to assist Ye Yin. This ship is also not a warship. I can do nothing to them!" Ye Pang sounded profoundly helpless.

"Do we need them gone?" Ye Chong finally broke his silence.

Ye Pang took a glance at Ye Chong, and nodded. "If they are scouts for a larger swarm of creatures, we'll be in big trouble if we

don't get rid of them! The rest of the swarm might come down on us!"

"Alright! Then I'm heading out!"

Ye Chong took out Feng Su's dimension keystone from his bag and passed it Feng Su. He said to her with an undefiable voice, "You're going with me."

Feng Su accepted her dimension keystone and quietly agreed. She knew that the only ones with real battle experience on this ship were this cold, apathetic young man and herself. Guardian might be a powerful mech, but it could hardly travel in outer space.

Ye Pang felt a glimpse of hope, but felt worried as well. "We don't know how dangerous these creatures are, you ..."

"We're heading off to prepare ourselves." Ye Chong cut him off and turned away to leave the bridge. Feng Su immediately followed him.

Rui Bing bit her lips, watching Ye Chong leave without stopping him. She understood that Guardian would only be a burden in outer space.

Ye Chong and Feng Su were weathered combatants, and they were quickly done with preparations.

"A Phoenix class mech!" Everyone in the bridge was surprised. No one imagined that such a fragile looking beauty would be one of the elites of their enemy, the Xi Feng Tribe! Ye Pang, however, looked like he had guessed as much.

When Han Jia appeared before them, everyone gasped again in admiration! Han Jia's beauty was a marvel to behold!

"Configure your comms!"

"Comms configured!"

"Begin mech assessment!"

"Mech assessment complete!"

"All the best. Prepare for launching. In five, four, three, two, one. Launch!"

Two hatches slid open.

As all eyes watched nervously on the holographic screen, two mechs with their engines ready dived into the vast outer space like two brilliant comets!

Chapter 428: The Perfect Kill

Seven unknown lifeforms formed a straight line, like a snake, as they continued circling around the starship. Compared to these agile little creatures, the starship was like a slow and dumb old cow.

All seven creatures were clearly displayed on Han Jia's holographic screen. What agility! Ye Chong was quietly surprised. These unknown lifeforms were flying about smoothly in space with astonishing grace. Ye Chong believed that even the best mechs could not achieve this level of agility.

It was unfortunate that he was a bad shot. If they had a sharpshooter like Mu or Shang right now, they would only need seven shots to end the battle. As a close range mech, Han Jia's attack range was much smaller. The only thing that Ye Chong could only rely on was Han Jia's speed.

Han Jia could go up to a jaw-dropping Mach 20!

Aside that, he had Feng Su behind him. While he did not know how well Feng Su could fight with a Phoenix class mech, her strength when using Wings of Nirvana long ago had left a deep impression in him. Ye Chong would never doubt the power of advanced level mechs from the Three Aristocratic Families. Of course, the likelihood of someone as useless as Ye Luo having a mech as powerful as Moon King was just about nil.

Ye Chong and Feng Su did not exchange a word, but Ye Chong believed that Feng Su would know what to do. This was the power of coordination between experts!

Ye Chong's hands flew across Han Jia's controls in a blur.

Han Jia accelerated abruptly!

No matter the time and location, speed could always make one's blood boil in excitement.

While the crew members of Darvill were not combatants, almost everyone in modern society would know a thing or two about mechs.

"Wow!" The surprised gasps lightened the mood in the starship. The holographic screen was like an eye magnet, demanding the attention of everyone onboard the ship. Everyone stopped what they were doing and stared at the holographic screen, astounded, including Ye Pang. At the beginning, the starship's holographic scanning system could not pick up the two mechs. It was only when they switched to optical mode that they were able to see the two mechs on the holographic screen. The impressive anti scanning abilities of the two mechs inspired hope from the crew members in them.

The Phoenix class mech had not done anything just yet, but the mysterious and beautiful mech was also making everyone feel excited.

Mach 20! After Lian Yue's modifications and the use of teardrop mineralite, Han Jia could now reach stunning velocities!

Han Jia's speed also left Feng Su with feelings of fear and awe. She had never seen a mech at such terrifying speed! Han Jia's abrupt acceleration also disrupted her rhythm. However, she was a weathered combatant, a true veteran, and she immediately adjusted herself. All her hidden shooting chambers were activated.

The holographic screen's combat locking system was initiated. To ensure perfect accuracy, she did not lock on to all the targets, but chose to focus on only two of them. She had never seen these creatures before, and had no idea of their defense systems.

She did not fire yet, but waited calmly for the right timing.

At Mach 20, 20 kilometers were covered in a breeze.

Back on the starship, everyone watched the holographic screen attentively. Mach 20 would put a very huge pressure on the human

body. Piloting the mech would also be much more difficult. At this speed, there would not be much time for the mech pilot to think before acting.

Ye Chong fixed his gaze at the unknown lifeforms. As they grew larger and larger on the holographic screen, he maintained his calm. Unlike other mech pilots, he had been to Archipelago before, and had encountered all sorts of weird creatures. He was not troubled by the fact that his targets were still unknown to them.

At Mach 20, he did not have time to even consider these things. He was exceptionally focused right now, his hands resting slightly on the controls, ready to move.

The unknown lifeforms were very sensitive. The feelers on their foreheads twitched. They were about to get away! Han Jia's astonishing speed had made them nervous.

Just when they were about to leave, dozens of purple colored laser beams shot across the dark sky of outer space!

These dozens of laser beams directly hit two of those creatures! None of the lasers missed. The two creatures were full of holes in an instant.

All the crew members watching the holographic screen on the starship cheered jubilantly!

The sudden attack made the nervous unknown lifeforms go into full blown panic!

The momentary pause in their motions just as they were about to leave was key. They were now in a mess, but still close to each other.

The two dozen tentacles on Han Jia's wings were released abruptly. Han Jia's hands were now holding two daggers.

Han Jia charged into the panicking creatures like a shooting rainbow!

Inside the pilot cabin, Ye Chong's eyes widened, and his hands began to fly across the controls!

Ye Chong did not know how fast his hands were moving right then, but he knew that he was giving all he got. This was because he knew that, at Mach 20, he would fly past the creatures in an instant, in less than a hundredth of a second, and he would need to attack them in this short time frame.

Is this the limit of the human body?

He did not know about that, but he did know that this was a golden opportunity!

The arching tentacles shot out like a snake uncurling itself, straight towards its victims! The greyish daggers were hard to see in the darkness of outer space, and only Ye Chong in his mech could see its dim glimmer briefly pass through his vision.

Two unknown lifeforms were thoroughly destroyed by the tentacles. At Mach 20, even a tiny rock could be devastating, much less with these strong tentacles!

Han Jia flew right into one of the creatures.

It's a homerun! The creature was sliced open like it just flew into the sharp edge of a knife, its body split into two as black colored blood oozed out of its remains. Its two body parts flew rapidly outwards. Ye Chong's eyes were burning with a desire to fight. He had waited for this moment. At the instant he flew into the creature, his hands began to move again.

Under the disbelieving gazes of everyone on the ship, the mysterious and beautiful mech made a very slight course adjustment! It was like a beam of light reflecting off a mirror at a very small angle.

This abrupt directional shift was packed with much more power than Ye Chong had anticipated at Mach 2. The momentum change was enough to make someone as strong as Ye Chong feel instant

dizziness and nausea.

The course correction was so small that it was almost impossible to notice.

To Ye Chong, however, it was enough.

Ye Chong held back his discomfort and activated his final attack command that was set up earlier.

One of the tentacles reached out and tore through one of the unknown lifeforms, its sharp tip ripping a straight tear through the soft body of the unknown lifeform at Mach 20. By the time the black colored blood and intestines began to pour out, Han Jia was already far away.

Han Jia was like an unhindered arrow, shooting past the weak formation of the unknown lifeforms. In that short instant, it had achieved its most important objective.

It had killed four of the creatures. The one creature that Han Jia flew into was in fact already cut into two by its dagger.

The destructive power of both Ye Chong and Han Jia were fully demonstrated in this extremely short moment!

For the last part of the battle, Ye Chong believed that Feng Su would be able to deliver flawlessly. Feng Su's first shots had been perfectly timed, and even the most critical mech pilot would be satisfied with them. It was her perfect shots that allowed Ye Chong to achieve his glorious body count. Xi Feng Tribe's mech pilots had always been known for their excellent timing.

Ye Chong tried to regulate his own body as Han Jia slowed down. The dizziness had put him into a very vulnerable position.

Mach 20 was truly very stressful for the body! Ye Chong laughed ironically inside. If this was a fight against another mech, his situation would have been very dangerous.

Right now, Han Jia was like a comet that was flying out of

control, drifting off into space along its inertial trajectory.

Ye Chong was right. The last unknown lifeform was swiftly dealt with by Feng Su. She had even taken another shot at the creature which Ye Chong had torn open its abdomen, just to be safe.

Ye Chong finally gathered himself and flew Han Jia slowly back to the starship.

When Ye Chong and Feng Su were back on Darvill, they were welcomed warmly like heroes.

Everyone looked at them with eyes filled with the fire of hope. In this age, a strong mech pilot could easily win the admiration of others. Everyone was still basking in the afterglow of the glorious and perfect victory. Ye Family's people had a higher standard, of course, but they still thought that the battle just now was just extraordinary.

Feng Su's perfect timing, Ye Chong's brute strength and Han Jia's Mach 20 speed had become an unforgettable memory for each of them.

This battle had greatly raised the morale of everyone onboard the ship.

However, Ye Chong was unmoved by the looks of admiration shot at him throughout. He was now focused on the bodies of the two unknown lifeforms that they had carried onboard.

Chapter 429: Strength in Numbers

Of all the dead creatures, only the two that were stabbed with Han Jia's tentacles were mostly preserved. Ye Chong was left with only these two bodies to bring back with him. It was the first time humanity had seen this lifeform, and it was important to study it.

"I hope that this unknown lifeform is different from the ones Ye Yin and the others encountered. If they are the same species, then we're in trouble!" Ye Pang looked solemn as he said with a sarcastic smile.

Ye Luo asked, "Why?"

"There are only two possibilities if they're one and the same. One, these unknown lifeforms are spread across a very large area; two, they are already very close to us! Which one would you choose?" Ye Pang could not help being scornful towards him.

"Neither!" Ye Luo shook his head frankly.

Ye Chong ignored as he lowered himself down to study the two dead bodies. Once, in order to solve a problem that was particularly awkward in nature, Ye Chong had dedicated some time in biology. Nevertheless, his meager understanding could not help him much. What would really do him good was experience.

The purplish black shell was very hard, but not thick, else Han Jia's tentacles would not have been able to pierce through them. The creature's belly was soft, without the shell to protect it. The sharp blades on its sides were dangerous. The eye on each armor plate now looked lifeless. Ye Chong was beginning to believe Ye Pang's theory that these mysterious creatures were actually scouts of some kind.

From their battle earlier, it seemed that these creatures could move very fast, but their attack and defense were weak, typical of scouting type organisms.

Ye Pang did not want to invoke more panic in the crew, so their discussions were held in the medical bay. The technical side of things will have to be left to the ship's professional medical officer, and see if they could get anything useful out of the bodies.

As the group left the medical bay, they passed by excited faces discussing the battle earlier as they walked along the ship's corridors. When they saw Ye Chong, the devotion in their eyes was like that of his number one fans. Ye Pang and Ye Luo were mostly ignored, and this annoyed Ye Luo. As for Feng Su, the crew members treated her more carefully, since she was from the Xi Feng Tribe.

Rui Bing trailed along behind Ye Chong, never leaving his side.

After dinner, Ye Pang invited Ye Luo to his room.

"Who are those people?" Ye Pang asked in a whisper.

Ye Luo scratched his head and said, "Err, that's a difficult one."

Ye Pang sniffed at him. "What's so difficult about it? Even without you telling me, I know. Isn't that the one that the Family is searching for?"

Ye Luo was surprised, "Huh, how did you know?"

"What's so hard about this simple deduction? Look at you, so trusting in him. I know you like the back of my hand. Without researching his background thoroughly, would you have brought him here? Where are we heading to right now? To He Yue Galaxy. If he's a friend of yours from the free space zone, would you have brought him along to He Yue Galaxy? Err, of course, if it's your girl I suppose that's possible." Ye Pang last comment made Ye Luo blush.

"The mech that he deployed, I know instantly that it's the goods. A full-skeleton mech! I may have served for a long time in logistics, but I can still tell. He's very strong. I think he'll even be ranked in the single digits in the Family. If I remember correctly, the man

that's very similar to one of our own is also a very capable mech pilot. So, I made a guess. But you, oh so gullible, admitted it straight away, you're so useless!" Ye Pang looked at Ye Luo with disdain.

Ye Luo was offended now. He curled his hands into fists, cracking his finger joints to intimidate Ye Pang. "Small Fry, I'll let you know, don't you go showing off in front of me. Hehe, I can bring you down with just one hand."

Ye Pang was unfazed by his show. He looked at Ye Luo meaningfully and sighed. "Boorish Luo, I can't figure you out. Why're you helping him? You're dead if your father finds out!"

Ye Lu's expression was unreadable. "I don't know either. I just know that he won't want to return to the Ye Family. Even I am not fond of the Family. Besides, what right do we have to order him back? I despise people who like to force their will onto others. On the other hand, I actually enjoy his company. Had I realized the situation earlier, I would've never reported back about him."

"Sigh, Boorish Luo, recognize the reality of things. He is just a single person, and can never defeat the Ye Family. In the end, he will be subdued." Ye Pang could not help a sigh.

"Small Fry, it's this part of you that I cannot stand! Reality? F*ck reality! Just look at me, hehe, hasn't the Family been asking me to go back since forever? Humph, I won't. See, they can't do nothing to me. Besides, I do what I think is right, and I have no regrets! I know exactly how the Family is like. Small Fry, with your level of abilities, you shouldn't have needed to stay in this run down place and be some no-good Chief of Logistics."

Ye Pang could only smile bitterly at that. "Logistics isn't too bad, suitable for someone lazy like me!"

"You! Sigh ..." Ye Luo seemed to remember something, and lost his initial excitement. He sat down in dejection, and it was a long moment before he spoke again. "What're you going to do with

him?"

"Do? I'll do nothing, since it's none of my business!" Ye Pang looked like his lazy old self again. However, he could not help but asked, "I can guess about the young man, but what about the woman? A member of the Xi Feng Tribe? What's their relationship? What about the rest in the group?"

Ye Luo shrugged evasively and said, "I don't know, you ask them."

Ye Pang was speechless.

The ship did not encounter any more of those unknown lifeforms later on. This was a great relief for the crew members. Another piece of good news was that they had met another transport ship along the way. The meeting between the two ships brought a joyful cheer to their crews.

In the infinity of outer space, loneliness was frightening. Hence, having company along was undoubtedly the most joyful thing to happen to them.

As they approached the rendezvous point, they met more and more transport ships. Soon, almost every hour brought about a new ship of the Ye Family to join them. This managed to soothe the nerves of the crew and its passengers.

The rendezvous point was on a small planet not far from the Gateway entrance.

The planet was not large. Its surface was now covered with all sorts of starships, with mechs flying in and out of them constantly. The planet had become a busy military base.

With coordination from the ground, Darvill finally landed on the small planet. Here was all the military power of the Ye Family in the free space zone, converged on this planet. After receiving the emergency beacon, all combat units had went straight towards the rendezvous point as soon as they could.

Ye Pang was not invited to the operations meeting. On Darvill, the only one entitled to attending the meeting was Ye Luo, but of course the man did not care to join the others. He declined to attend the meeting.

Nevertheless, Ye Pang still managed to uncover some information through other means.

In the bridge, only Ye Luo, Ye Pang, Ye Chong, Rui Bing and Feng Su were there.

Their expressions were not encouraging.

Darvill's encounter with the unknown lifeforms was reported to Ye Yin's subordinates, so the two bodies of the creatures were taken away from them. They had already ascertained that these unknown lifeforms were one of a few kinds that were attacking the Gateway.

The situation was more serious than expected.

When Ye Yin and his men arrived for backup, it was already too late. The entire Gateway was swarmed with a few different kinds of unknown lifeforms.

This was the worst situation that everyone had hoped to avoid! Once the Gateway was lost, they would have to clear it should they ever want to return to their homes.

After many days of contact, they now finally had some understanding of these mysterious creatures.

The creatures may not look alike, but they all had some common features - high aggression, and a strong propensity to devour anything that was made of metal or pure energy.

There was not much left of the mechs that were destroyed in their first wave of attack. The creatures had swallowed up most of the metal pieces like hungry ants.

Just thinking about it make one's flesh creep.

Clearing up the Gateway was now the main problem.

"Small Fry, you got any good ideas?" Ye Luo looked to Ye Pang.

Ye Pang shook his head. "None. However, I think that the most important thing we should do now is to understand more about these creatures. It's all we can do for now. We know next to nothing about these creatures, much less their weaknesses."

Ye Luo seemed to be disappointed with Ye Pang's lack of ideas. Ye Chong, Rui Bing and Feng Su did not speak, only observing the two of them.

Though he usually stayed quiet, Ye Chong spoke up this time. "What of the Xue Lai Clan and Xi Feng Tribe?"

Everyone paused to absorb his words.

"That's right! I wonder what happened to them?" Ye Pang seemed to give it some thought. If they had also encountered the same unknown lifeforms, they would probably not fare any better. The thought of the Three Aces being stuck in the free space zone was almost ridiculous to even consider for Ye Pang.

Soon, however, they had no time to consider how the other two Families were doing.

After resupplying, the Ye Family's combat division was ready to move out.

Chapter 430: Back to the Wall

Ye Chong spent most of his time watching the many, many battles that unfolded on the holographic screen on the starship. There were not many mechs and starships in the free space zone, hence there was not a lot of energy cells in storage. Ye Pang had already brought along all the energy cells from Serbe. Now, they could only watch as the war waged on.

The war was shockingly violent!

The Gateway's entrance was very narrow, a natural landscape for defense. That was why they were able to hold the line so far.

From the narrow entrance, swarms of the unknown lifeforms would emerge from time to time. They never came in large numbers, they never seemed to stop coming either. From the beginning, the number of unknown lifeforms that had emerged from the entrance had never diminished, showing no signs of exhaustion from the other side. This was a constant worry for everyone around, afraid of what would happen in the long run.

Their own forces were weakening as the days passed by. Heavy casualties would follow every time enemies were successfully terminated. However, no one backed down. Everyone knew that the narrow Gateway was the only reason they were still alive, and not consumed by the unknown lifeforms.

There was nothing else to do but fight on. Ye Yin looked terribly grim. He could not find a way out of their predicament.

Jenny Ye looked at Ye Yin's grim expression beneath his long hair, sympathizing his situation. She consoled him softly, "Look at you, you look so gloomy that it's going to rain soon. Don't worry too much. Here, drink this." She passed a thermos over to Ye Yin.

Ye Yin saw that it was Jenny, and his eyes flickered warmly. He agreed and took the thermos from Jenny, finishing all the soup in

it.

Jenny Ye watched lovingly as Ye Yin drank his soup with concentration, but her heart ached for him. This man whom she loved, he was shouldering too much unwanted burden! Beneath his handsome but cold exterior was a heart that was only human.

"What're you thinking?" Ye Yin asked suddenly. Now that the soup was finished, he watched her closely.

Jenny blushed slightly. She pulled the thermos out of his hands and feigned nonchalance as she said, "Nothing much. Yin, don't give yourself too much pressure! You're doing your best, no one will blame you."

Ye Yin said nothing, only watching Jenny Ye quietly.

"What is it?" Jenny Ye saw that Ye Yin was in a faze. She shook her tiny hand before his eyes a few times, saying with mock anger, "What are you thinking? How could your mind go wandering while talking to me?"

"Oh. I'm thinking, I will definitely bring you home! Definitely!" Ye Yin said this with unyielding resolution.

Anyone could see that the war was not favoring the Ye Family. Their combat forces continued to diminish. Almost every round of battle would end in deaths on their side. Seeing their own die before them continuously was a heavy blow to their morale. One could frequently hear people sobbing in the middle of the night. They were at their lowest point in spirit.

Nonetheless, the immediate problem presented to them was a practical one - energy cells! The free space zone did not have production factories for energy cells. Their energy cells were running out. Once they used them up, all the mechs and starships would turn into useless metal bulks, and the war would be over.

Dozens of unknown lifeforms emerged again from the Gateway's entrance.

The mechs that were guarding the entrance immediately went forward to fight them.

30 mechs formed a standard combat squad. Five mechs accelerated abruptly, leaving formation and heading towards the unknown lifeforms. When they were close enough, they suddenly split up and headed off into five different directions.

The creatures immediately pursued the five mechs like they were hunting their favourite prey, splitting off into five groups. The decoy mechs were all flown by the best mech pilots. They traced five beautiful arches across the starry sky like the stamen of a flower. Then, they each flew past a group of five mechs, and the creatures plunged straight into the surrounding formation of the five mechs.

The suspenseful close range battle began!

The strength of the Ye Family's mech pilots were thus fully demonstrated. Mechs and creatures rushed towards each other like medieval knights in a joust. When the moment of impact arrived, however, the mech pilots of the Ye Family could always execute the appropriate evasion moves and deliver the fatal blow to these unknown lifeforms.

However, the creatures were also terribly capable of retaliating. Despite bearing audience to similar fights for numerous times, Ye Chong still find them shocking. The creatures could move their heads deftly, and their strong teeth would always leave deep bite marks on mechs.

These creatures, which they had called crustalades, had very strong exoskeletons. The purplish black shell plates on them shone with a metallic glimmer. They had six pairs of wings. Their bodies were flat and short, measuring about three meters long. Their heads could move around flexibly, and their teeth were strong enough to bite through certain kinds of metal. The crustalades were very sensitive to metals. According to research, their hard

armor plates had a high metal content. Hence, their armor plates were very strong, and well suited for self defense. Their shell plates would change, and even evolve significantly, according to the types of metal ingested.

Crustalades would fly up to Mach 12, about the same as the Ye Family's mechs in the main battle force. Since the creatures could also fly well, they were difficult opponents to fight against.

Now, most if not all of the creatures that came out of the Gateway entrance were this type of lifeform. The ones that Ye Chong and his group had encountered were never seen again.

The Ye Family's mechs lacked long range weapons, so they were forced to fight at close range.

Ye Chong pondered on their situation. Of the Three Aristocratic Families, the Xue Lai Clan must be best equipped to fight against these crustalades.

Rui Bing sat quietly beside Ye Chong. She would accompany him and watch the battle on the holographic screen every day. She did not say anything, but only sat quietly with him. Her snow white training garb looked as graceful on her as before. Her eyes were calm and resolute.

"What? The Three Families are ready for an alliance?" Ye Pang gasped in surprise.

Ye Luo nodded. "Yes. I just got the news. Looks like the other Families have also suffered heavily, so they are hoping to form an alliance now. Oh, by the way, Ye Yin has agreed."

Ye Pang stroked his chin as he mused, "An Alliance of the Three Families. It's not a bad idea. To think that we, the Three Families, long time enemies with each other, will agree to an alliance in the face of a disaster. Hehe, it sure is interesting." He thought of something then, and asked, "What about the Gateway?"

"Seal the entrance. Ye Yin has decided to seal the entrance," Ye

Luo replied.

Space around the Gateway entrance was extremely unstable. It was engulfed in a light yellow nebula. Within the nebula were strong electromagnetic radiations that covered a wide spectrum. The magnetic fields in the nebula were also constantly realigning. This made the area dangerous. Even the tough lifeforms were cautious of the space around the entrance.

300 energy cells were bundled together. They now floated before the Gateway entrance.

All of Ye Family's starships had pulled away, giving a wide berth.

Everyone onboard Darvill focused on the holographic screen.

Dozens of crustalades emerged threateningly from the Gateway entrance. They noticed the energy cells immediately and flew towards them.

Just then, a red beam shot at the energy cells!

The holographic screen lit up, and everyone had to shade their eyes for the moment. When their vision cleared up, the Gateway entrance was no longer on the holographic screen. Instead, they were looking at an endless stretch of light yellow nebula.

The massive starship fleet carried the hopes of its passengers, heading towards the Xue Lai Clan's Gateway entrance as fast as it could.

Ye Pang looked at the dense presence of starships from his window and smiled. "We'll probably never see something like this again. Isn't it magnificent?" After the rendezvous, the starships from all the Three Aristocratic Families were huddled together without order. Darvill was now right beside one of the Xi Feng Tribe's starships.

"I want to return to my Tribe," Feng Su looked at Ye Chong and pronounced her every word clearly. Every combat personnel was precious in their situation.

Ye Chong thought about it for a moment and nodded in agreement. "Alright."

Feng Su looked around and nodded to the people around her. "I wish you all the best! Farewell!" Everyone watched silently as Feng Su left. Given the circumstances, whatever personal conflicts they had with her were relatively insignificant. Besides, Ye Chong had never really developed a grudge against her.

The Three Aces from the Three Aristocratic Families gathered together.

"Hehe, fate is truly mysterious. To think that we would actually fight side by side!" Huang Jiming smiled warmly.

Ye Yin ignored him and turned to Siva. "Why don't you explain the situation here."

In the operations room, two humans and one mech discussed their predicament. It was an uncanny sight.

Siva's bionic eyes flashed intermittently. "Our initial battles were successful. The crustalades could not harm us. However, once we enter the Gateway, we suffer heavily."

An image appeared on the holographic screen in the operations room. The massive being in the image caused the two humans to inhale sharply.

"This is a new kind of unknown lifeform. We call them mollusc bristleworms. They looked like large caterpillars, but covered with sharp spikes on them. Each spike was about seven to eight meters long, and many crustalades were hanging from it.

Siva's electronic voice reverberated in the operations room. "The interesting thing about these mollusc bristleworms is they could absorb energy weapon attacks, the mechanism for this is unknown. They move slowly, reaching up to Mach 6. Their bodies are covered with pores that could spew out a grayish green gas. This gas has been shown to weaken metal structures. After

computations, we've determined that the massive being in the image is formed by about six thousand five hundred mollusc bristleworms."

The number was enough to trigger another sharp inhale from the two listeners. Six thousand five hundred mollusc bristleworms with slight variations in colour intensity formed a massive dragon-like colourful being. It was a terrifying beast.

"We have ascertained that the entire Gateway had only these six thousand and five hundred mollusc bristleworms. We have killed most of the crustalades. The rest of the crustalades can also be handled by our side. Your forces must deal with these mollusc bristleworms. Be aware that we have energy to only supply one final attack!"

Siva's electronic voice never wavered.

Chapter 431: Chaos Itself

Ye Chong carefully inspected every part of Han Jia. The prelude of war was haunting the atmosphere within the ship. Being a cargo vessel, because of its lack of proper defense mechanism, it would be a gamble whether if they could even pass the pathway. All forces had already been sent to the frontline, so nobody would be saving them, only they could save themselves.

The plan was to blast off with maximum firepower at one point and zap through the pathway before things happened. That would be far riskier since a defenseless vessel like Darvill might be crashing into clusters of Crustalades in the course. But they had no other option. The forces of the three aristocrats were subsiding drastically, the families could no longer disperse their military forces to escort the vessels.

Meanwhile, the crew members of Darrell were rather relieved of having a super fighter in their ship since that would simply translate as a likelihood to survive.

The entrance to the pathway was a narrow one. So, the ships must travel in almost like a queue, where one tailed the other. If it was not Xue Lai's achievement in the battle before, this massive evacuation would never happen. Xue Lai clan was far ahead of the other aristocrats, they had already hit the center of the pathway, yet countless Crustalades raided them and they were helpless, eventually succumbed to requesting help.

It took about 5 days for the giant fleet consisted of the 3 aristocrats to travel through the entrance entirely. Darvill was currently at the core of the fleet and passed through the tiny gap on the third day of the course.

Unlike the tiny opening before, the interior of the pathway was rather spacious, so the fleet could finally breathe.

It felt like another world inside...

The leading ship of the fleet was on full fire, as shower of beams clashed densely with the opposite.

A war had already happened!

The fleet was traveling sluggishly, as Xue Lai clan and Xi Feng tribe had teamed up to fight back on full force. Beams of different colors slashed through the wave of aggressive Crustalades.

The happening ahead was transmitted to the hologram projections of all ships behind. It was a stunning visual which people would stumble upon.

And now they finally could understand the reason the squad of each family had fallen, as they recognized the seriousness of the attack.

Xue Lai clan and Xi Feng tribe shone on this stage, for they had great technologies specialized in ranged attacks. The lasers sliced through darkness like a meteor shower, as they seared the purplish dark cloud of Crustalades.

The joint attack of two families might be impeccable but the number of Crutalades was overwhelming, that a handful of them survived even under the dense net of fired beams. Of course, they would not last when they reached the second defense line, where the Ye family was standing. The mechs of Ye family wielded a pair of iron fists, shredding the remaining arthropods.

Han Jia was hovering near Darvill. He did not advance forward, since he knew the frontline had already become a slaughterhouse. An additional man or two would not change a thing.

Han Jia, the skeleton mech was invisible in most detection systems, so no other ships had actually noticed its existence in the dark.

Looking at the fireworks ahead, Ye Chong could not help but to sigh, as finding his strength insignificant in this galactic battle.

HNNNNGGGG!

Suddenly, a Crustalade flew by, seemingly unaware of Han Jia.

It was heading towards Darvill rapidly!

Ye Chong could even see its jaw flapping excitingly.

Wait, it did not come for me?

Ye Chong was confused, but somehow the insect ignored him in fact.

Wait... does that mean...

Ye Chong had an idea. He wanted to test something.

Han Jia remained static like a piece of meteorite in the space, anticipating the arriving arthropod.

500 meters.

The course of Crustalade unchanged.

300 meters.

Unchanged.

100 meters.

Unchanged?

Ye Chong's speculation was getting verified. The truth was revealing.

3 meters...

HHNNNNNNNGGG...

Han Jia was completely ignored. The daggers were drawn, the shadow danced, then the insect was bisected as it passed the unseen. Do-Kun stone was still the hardest. Thought Ye Chong as he looked at the sliced phylum.

The wave of Crustalades looked endless. There were simply too many of them that casualties started to be heard of mechs from both Xue Lai clan and Xi Feng tribe ahead.

The force was weakening. The Crustalades within the fleet were

increasing as manically they pounced upon the giant spaceships.

Their jaws were destructive as the metallic armors of the ship were scrapped like polystyrene. One ship was rather unfortunate to have been raided by over hundreds Crustalades, a nightmarish scene it was. A spaceship's armor was dense by nature, but it would only be a matter of time till every layer was torn and a rupture would occur.

Ye Chong could not help the other ships as Darvill was also surrounded by a huge flock of Crustalades.

His test had proven the fact that Han Jia was undetected by these hungry pests. That would be perfect as Ye Chong would truly be an invisible hunter. It would be assassination all over again.

The pathway was getting chaotic. The fleet had ceased, the spaceships were trying to catch up with each other, yet covered by the gnawing insects. The space had already been flooded with pieces of shattered mech and carcasses.

Boom! One ship had blown up as the space suddenly turned bright. The fleet panicked as the ships started clogging the course.

Crustalades were innately small arthropods but the fact they fed on metals was simply a horror. A few spaceships exploded next.

And there Ye Chong was, feeling sentimental of his helpless insignificance again. The only he could do was to protect Darvill at all costs. He might be able to walk past those vicious insects undetected, but that did not mean he would be safe at all time.

?!

And there he almost got hit by one of the debris from the spaceship explosion. The debris was visibly 1 kilometer long, Ye Chong could be crushed just because of the momentum conserved.

The place was chaotic, could be almost the chaos itself, that Ye Chong spent most of his attention span on the incoming pieces.

...(Darvill's Main Control Room)...

The members were alarmed as they scurried in the room, from one control panel to another, even Ye Pang the unshakable one began shaking a little.

Who cares about that magic mech out there anymore! We have an invasion to handle!

People were trying to minimize crashes with the other spaceships as the course had been utterly disrupted. They were fully attentive because a slip of the finger, a careless mistake simple could have killed the entire crew.

Well Ye Chong was relatively calm as he took cover within the giant Darvill under the heavy debris shower.

Tick!

The gate of Darvill opened out of sudden, soon a golden silhouette tumbled its way out.

Rui Bing?

Why did she...

Ye Chong was surprised. The Guardian was formidable but also limited in a space war like this, so why?

"Why did you come out?" asked Ye Chong grimly in the communicator channel prompted.

"I want to fight with you!" said Rui Bing firmly.

Ye Chong wanted to convince her by saying how the Guardian was simply not made for such environment but Rui Bing did something...

She demonstrated martial arts.

Rui Bing hopped onto on one pole sticking out on the deck and transformed into a beam of golden light bouncing off on another pole. Ye Chong was seeing Rui Bing becoming a kind of golden

reflection moving from one pole or handle to another.

And because of the lack of gravity, it did not take Rui Bing much effort to main her momentum. She was literally zapping like electricity, but the consumption was not as dramatic as it looked.

This idea's not bad...

Ye Chong was impressed of Rui Bing's adaptability, although he did perceive one weakness immediately. The movement allowed Rui Bing's mobility but it would be highly dependent on the objects around, Rui Bing would need to always find something to hold in order to make another leap. Moreover, it was always possible for her to bounce off at a wrong angle, that she might send herself into deep space. It would be a tragedy by then...

"Rui Bing, I think-" She seemed to know what Ye Chong was thinking as she made a tap on the ship and bounced off Darvill.

What was she doing?! The Guardian had only miniature engines, there's no engine that promoted a directive aerial travel! You can't find any handle in the boundless space!

Ye Chong was hurrying his way to Rui Bing but Rui Bing was undisturbed, as she leisurely tapped a button on her waist, a rope was released and fired upon the body of the ship behind. There was a sucker at the end of the rope which helped fixing the rope on the ship firmly. Rui Bing stretched forward a little, then like a Yo-yo she was pulled back to the ship.

Ye Chong then noticed the additional rectangular metallic box at Guardian's waist.

"Ye, Pang got me this," said Rui Bing, with slight joy in her chilly voice.

"Be careful," said the indifferent voice. Rui Bing felt the 3 syllables warming her inside up nevertheless, "Alright," she said.

Rui Bing then had a stroll across the body of the ship. Her skill picked up as she grew familiar of the layout of the ship. She began

brisk-walking. It was not far-fetched to say the Guardian was made for Rui Bing. The dagger of the Guardian was greatly honed and unstoppable even in the raining attack of the hard Crustalades. Rui Bing also had the sense to aid her on performing critical attacks efficiently. Crustalades might be fast but they were there to be slaughtered once they touched Darvill. Rui Bing was getting better on her moonwalking.

Thanks to Rui Bing, Ye Chong had more liberty in the space.

There was one ship of Xue Lai clan next to Darvill.

"Holy Xue Lai, what the heck was that?" one observer screamed exhilaratingly.

The crew members then quickly shifted the camera to that "something".

"What's wrong? Hey... Fei She'er! Talk to your captain!" said the captain loudly.

What the hell is my sailor talking? Stop making this into a cruise of a horror movie.

"Fei She'er!" Intense anger could be heard in the elevated volume of the captain.

"Ah!" Fei She'er lifted his head, turned his head only to see the horrifying face of the captain in anger, "No sir! I mean, yes captain, sir, mister, I-I don't know, please take a look..." And he instantly sent the visual of his camera to the giant screen in front of the captain's seat.

The boundless space.

The chaotic walkway to the world outside.

"What is there, Fei She'er, do you think it is funny to trick your crew? Would you like to work at the-"

"Captain!"

A few Crustalades showed up in the screen. They became restless

upon seeing the ship as quickly they charged towards it.

"Ah!" The crew member could not help but to scream. The captain's hope sank, they would be soon good-as-done once these disgusting insects touched the ship.

The shell of the arthropods shone in purplish dark metallic glow, reflecting the fireworks afar. The jaws were opening and closing in belligerent pace of hunger, as their purple brown eyes covetously projected in a high definition zoom-in on the screen.

Hope had sunken. The ship would be blowing up. And there was nothing they could do. A few members decided to lay back and close their eyes.

"Captain!"

Something was flashing in the dark. A blade seemed to have swayed across the closest arthropod which then turned into two pieces with countless droplets of purplish black fluid hovering in the space.

That was the first.

Then second... third... forth...

The Crustalades had all died?

"D-d-d-did a miracle happen? Did god decide to help us?" muttered one man.

"Quick!" The captain seemed to have thought of something, "Turn on Photon-mode, now!"

Under photon mode they might have a limited vision, but the colors were richer. As the explosion had become a seeming firework upon regaining its colors. Beams were crossing and forming a colorful net engulfing the world ahead.

But no crew member had the attention on the scenery. They were all staring at that petite beauty at one corner.

It was a mech gorgeous as the butterfly, with a spread of rainbow

wings adorned by glittering stars of liquid gold. It hovered in pride within the void, as it set its eyes upon the floating carcasses.

Two days.

Chaos itself had visited for two days, which caused several explosions across different ships. The pathway was almost clogged with all sorts of rubbles, be them from the spaceships or the mechs.

The progression was nearly zero on their course within the last two days, as they literally inched their way ahead. The beams of light remained dancing and Ye Chong had lost count of the number of Crustalades he had sliced.

It was the third day of visit by chaos itself.

Ye Chong started seeing a decrease in the number of Crustalades in the space.

Has it ended?

Wait, no!

He realized something... as goosebumps ran over his skin.

Instinct told him that the crucial moment which would determine the outcome of the war had arrived!

He waved at Rui Bing and zoomed ahead.

Chapter 432: Fight for Your Destiny!

"It would depend on all of you," said Brahmara.

Ye Yin's expression was somber, with the little flicker of light remaining in his soulless eyes.

He had witnessed everything in the past three days. Xue Lai clan and Xi Feng tribe suffered the greatest loss as they lost at least half of their men being at the frontmost line. It was also known as the highest amount of casualty in the record of history in the past few years.

Non-combat units in the fleet also suffered a considerable amount of damage due to limited energy supply. These ships were not assigned a combative role in the evacuation, so they were only given the energy amount for basic flights. In their plan, most of the batteries had been given to the mechs of frontline. They had to, or the frontmost defense line would never last beyond three days. The only saving grace was, most of the goals of the evacuation had been achieved this time, though with a great cost.

The clouds of Crustalades had slowly faded away, as the giant ones had probably been wiped out. Their minions were still everything nevertheless. Ye Yin had a much important mission to carry out thus they decided to treat these pests with ignorance.

There was one last obstacle in their course.

The mollusc bristleworm, 6000 of them or so.

These bristleworms had gathered up and formed into a gigantic conglomeration, which wriggled like a dragon of darkness as it stood in the way of the fleet.

Ye Yin's eyes were dimmed as he looked upon the giant monstrosity. How many people would he have to lose in order to get home? How many people could survive in this ever-going fight? It took a few moments of silence for him to muster that

inner voice of his, his eyes sharpened, "Go as planned. Attack!" shouted the ultimate order.

The mechs retreated and the fleet reformed as the ships accelerated.

The ships hovered across the pathway at the front.

These ships were empty and were moving under pre-programmed piloting.

The ships sped up dramatically.

Mach 8

Mach 10

Mach 12!

The empty ships were leading their own parade as they hurriedly charged towards the wriggling ugly monster.

These vessels had been modified with additional engines to give him stronger thrust, thus the ability to hit Mach 12 effortlessly.

It was not easy to defeat the conglomerated worms. Ye Yin and the rest had cracked their head thinking up a plan. The conglomeration was imaginably massive. One bristleworm would be about 40 meters in length, 6 to 7 meters in breadth. Now, multiply the figures by 6000 to get the estimated size of the monstrosity. It was simply horribly giant that mechs felt like the ants before the anteater. It would be impossible to slash through the monster with insufficient momentum. Things would only work if the fleet drilled its way through.

All the ships were travelling at maximum speed. Ye Chong was a little astonished by the grand view as he saw the distance decreasing between the fleet of empty ships and the monster.

The bristleworms seemed to have noticed the incoming fleet as the surface of the monster was quivering. The monster turned restless as it began thrashing.

The 50 empty ships then sank into the body of the monster.

Boom!

The monster had been pierced at its weak spot, as it began squirming in immense pain.

The bristleworms leaked out of the conglomeration upon contact, as they began scurrying around in panic. The empty ships continued "drilling", to the deepest of the monster.

And at the next moment, the monster collapsed, as a wave of bristleworms engulfed the pathway.

The bristleworms were writhing everywhere frantically, where clouds of green smoke escaped from their bodies and cloaked the entire place.

The fleet could only see the green sea ahead while making out the shape of those little squirming silhouettes.

"A-all units ahead!" Ye Yin's calm voice cracked a little, as he launched the final gambit of entire fleet. His mech had first initiated the move, as it travelled ahead at full speed.

No doubt it was a final gambit for them, as the release of those green gases had an effect that promoted disintegration of metals. The metal would gradually lose its particle cohesion upon contact, resulting a highly brittle structure that eventually would break down on its own due to the overwhelming artificial air pressure controlled inside the ship. In simpler terms, Brahmara had expected the effect to go on full swing in a duration of about 3 days, that would mean they would be a goner if they did not arrive at He Yue galaxy within the period.

It was just natural to die without the protection of any spaceship or mech.

But, that was not all. According to calculation, they would need 4 days to fully walk through the entire pathway and they had just hit the middle. Halving that and they still needed 2 more days to

completely exit the place, given that nothing happened that is. Nonetheless, the green worms were still there, at worst case scenario Ye Yin and the army must finish the battle in less than a day!

Time was no longer money, rather it was solely life to them at the moment. They must leave the pathway in 3 days, by hook or by crook, or else!

The main force of the second phase would be Ye family this time. Both Xue Lai clan and Xi Feng tribe had fully consumed their military forces. They had to take a break from battle also because of how bristleworms were completely immune towards energy-based firings, like those beams. So, they started clearing up the course instead. The remnants of Crustalades were everywhere. A cleanup would be needed.

Ye Yin had only 852 war machines left and they had to clear a way out in the midst of those green waving madness at the very least.

It would be either dead or alive! They were ready!

The 852 units took a cone-shaped formation, with Ye Yin, the strongest pilot of the family leading at the tip of the cone.

Ye Yin's mech was once a rare sight even hidden from his own family, and now it had made its debut to every ally. The 12 Spikedrops were circulating around its body, the afterimages of the momentary travel had veiled the mech in faint darkness.

Ye Yin led the army and advanced forward.

"Wait, he came too?" Huang Jiming was shocked as he got up from his seat, staring at that petite silhouette gracefully hovering in the projection.

The pilot's hands fluttered over the control panel. Han Jia's wings spread and silently flew behind the battle units.

Huang Jiming had kept photon mode on the whole time, since he

at first intended to observe how Ye Yin would look in action, never once he would expect Han Jia would be coming. Back on the staring contest in Risserd, this skeleton mech had impressed well enough. Sadly he never had the chance to have a duel with the pilot due to the sudden change of events.

Feng Su was right next to Huang Jiming, as her expressive eyes set upon that butterfly in the projection. Her lethargic face before had suddenly turned lively, as she reminisced those times she challenged this indifferent young man.

"DETECTION." Beeped the mechanical eyes of Brahmara, as prompted the projection of Han Jia.

"Ah! Brother Ye..."

Little Ye Chong knew that, the moment he hit the stage he had become the center of attention among these legends.

Ye Yin stared upon the misty world. Without hesitation, he had advanced forward, with the other mechs tailing after.

Inside the green mist, one could barely discern a thing. The detection system had become almost good-for-nothing thanks to the interferences caused by these mists. The scope of detection had been squeezed into a negligible range, and their vision had been limited.

With such limited vision, one could hardly perform any dodging in a traveling mech. But well, Ye Yin never planned to try dodging anything anyway. Thus, he maintained his velocity and drove along.

One bristleworm came out of nowhere and slammed upon Ye Yin's face.

The circulating Spikedrops suddenly charged themselves, drilling into the body of the worm. One could see the worm vibrating because of the intensiveness of the drilling which the immense pain had caused the worm to try curling itself at countless failed

attempts.

And it exploded, becoming the bits of fleshes hovering in the space. The Spikedrops had shredded the bristleworm into countless pieces.

Ye Yin did not stop, as he kept up with his speed. These worms were vulnerable against his mech, not even their spikes could break the mech's armor.

The alarm had been wailing in the mech however, as the processor constantly prompting an alert illustrating the damage the mech received.

It must be those gases! The emission of bristleworms could break the mech of a top pilot in the galaxy, let alone those folks' mechs behind him. Ye Yin started suspecting the validity of Brahmara's calculation... wondering if they could even last for 3 complete days.

But they had no other choice. They only could charge on.

They would have a likelihood to survive as long as they left this nightmarish place as soon as possible.

He looked at the approaching sea of worms rumbling ahead. The battle will burned up high in his eyes, while his hands danced upon the interface. His mech then zoomed into the sea!

It is time! Time to fight, fight for your destiny!

Ye Chong stepped into the green mist. No doubt he turned blind like Ye Yin, he had far inferior detection system compared to Ye Yin's mech. Looking at the white buzzing screen, Ye Chong could not help but to switch to Photon detection mode.

The camera was flooded with an overflowing green, from which a bristleworm suddenly jumped at Han Jia. Ye Chong was slightly shocked as he tapped the control panel promptly and lifted two slashes with his daggers. A secreting cross was seen on the body of bristleworm. That was not the final blow. The body of that worm

was about 40 to 50 meters, so the tiny cross would not kill, even though the worm was already wriggling in pain, emitting more green gases to the surrounding, during which its tail slammed upon Han Jia.

Ye Chong responded quickly as Han Jia covered up itself with its wings.

The strength of this slam was beyond his expectation as Han Jia was sent far away like a whipped badminton.

That thing was sure huge for a reason... Thought Ye Chong, he did not intend to waste more time on this random enemy. A wounded beast would be far more dangerous than a normal beast, according to his experiences dealing with these wild lifeforms.

Han Jia gracefully turned away from the wounded caterpillar and flew forward. And then it jerked, as Ye Chong realized a major issue without a functioning detection system - he had lost his direction.

Ye Chong was at an awkward situation, knowing that these bristleworms were forceful by nature since those strong spaceships could get stuck, completely immobilized within their embrace.

Han Jia was at least far more agile than the gigantic spacecrafts. It could easily swim through the sea of worms. It did not take long for Ye Chong to notice the hidden system behind the sea of worms. Apparently, the appearance of the worm determined a certain kind of rank in its own hierarchy. The greener the worm, the higher rank it would be... since only the dark green bristleworms could emit those gases. The paler ones were seemingly younger so they were unable to perform such defense mechanism.

The hierarchy was justifiable as Ye Chong saw the unnoticed grouping where a dark green bristleworm would always lead three to four paler ones at a spot.

Ye Chong piloted Han Jia carefully, dodging one bristleworm to

another, realizing he had possibly ventured too deep into the sea of worms, as the surrounding grew denser. He also noticed that he was practically invisible too, assuming he did not open fire at these worms.

Hmm...

Wait, could it be these bristleworms have the same sensibility of metal as the Crustalades?

Ye Chong had something else in mind... but he could not put it together somehow... He tried harder, recollecting his thoughts as waving the handle over these pests, to the center of the sea.

Chapter 433: Bristleworm Hunt I

Not only Ye Chong, Ye Yin and the others were facing trouble in the mean time. At first, they assumed these worms knew no other defense mechanism than the emission of green gas, at least none of other possible defense mechanisms could wound their armor of machinery. But then, like Ye Chong, they started to recognize the strength of these worms as amplified by sizes. These pests were peskier than the men imagined, especially when these pests were highly sensitive of mechs, that these bristleworms would notice upon approaching.

Team Ye Yin was severely outnumbered. This fight would not be cake walk, even though so far there had not been any visible casualty in his team. Ironically, there had not been any visible progress in their travel as well.

The bristleworms were apparently unaffected by their own emission, their sensibility and mobility were still the same capable, unlike the mechs which had been completely slowed down due to the waves of these entities. A mech without speed would lose a large portion of its offensive capacity.

Yes, speed is what made a mech the fast and furious, the core of its existence!

Well, probably only Ye Yin's mech remained the same fast and furious as before, as luckily he had his Spikedrops guarding him with their efficient penetration which cleared out all bristleworms within the vicinity, making Ye Yin the sweeping pilot among his team.

The other mechs of Ye family were not as strong however, as they were swarmed by the bristleworms and that prevented them from accelerating freely as their will. Certainly, a mech's weaponry could harm these fleshy worms easily, but only to the extent before size became a matter. Once they faced a larger entity of the pests,

the attack would no longer be fatal, only would anger the entity, causing uncontrollable havoc instead.

Ye Yin could not help but to feel powerless at the sight of the endless worm waves ahead. It was as if he was stuck in a bog of depression when he thought of their plan of making a clear-out in less than a day for the fleet.

His hope was sinking but not his hands on the control panel.

The fight must go on.

Ye Yin's mech had a stronger engine than other mechs and was armed with those unpredictable Spikedrops, that was why he was far ahead of his team especially when he programmed the Spikedrops to directly destroy the insides of bristleworm upon contact.

Soon he realized he had lost his teammates.

But there was something else that caught his attention, as he saw a tiny conglomeration of about 50 bristleworms on the projection. It was peculiar because the empty fleet before had penetrated the giant conglomeration, yet there was still this lump before him, that was unseen before in the last few hours.

The conglomeration sluggishly crawled to the front, with the neighboring pale bristleworms letting the way out, as its size increased when the greener ones joined it gradually.

This is not right...

Ye Yin's heart quivered.

Was that a new cycle?

Did the gigantic conglomeration they spent 50 ships to defeat start its formation this way?

Assuming Ye Yin was not making a wild guess, then this small lump would very likely be the seed, the beginning of it. A sense of crisis rose in Ye Yin's mind as he imagined the happening if the

lump continued the process.

A new giant might be forming very soon!

They no longer had the leisure to modify empty ships to perform another drill attack! The conglomeration must not happen again!

In 3 days their shelter, the mechs would be disintegrated, they would die!

Ye Yin discarded the plan of heading back to his team. Instead, he had something in mind, regarding this growing lump of madness.

Ye Yin carefully followed the wriggling lump, his mind rapidly formed a basic plan on an attack. All he needed would be a good timin—

Something happened!

The lump seemed to have been stimulated by something as it began wriggling vigorously. In the space without air, Ye Yin could hardly hear a thing but somehow he imagined the monster was shrieking...

How?

The visual on his projection turned fuzzier over time. Ye Yin realized that the closer he approached the monster, the stronger the interference his detection system received. He could barely make out the shape of the worms around now.

As expected, this blob monster was not a simple task.

Thought Ye Yin, as his will to destroy it became firmer.

...(Meanwhile)...

Ye Chong was not doing great as well.

In short terms, he was finding chores for himself. The green mist was ineffective on his Han Jia, which gave him the freedom to do anything in the sea of green worms, as long as he behaved.

But the scene before him, and his thoughts, there seemed to be a

direct connection between each other.

Strange... be it bristleworm or Crustalades, why are they so sensitive over metallic objects? Especially when bristleworms favored objects that contain high amount of energy activity. These worms were truly the natural enemy of humanity! Be it metal or the energy, those are the natural necessity of humanity today. A complete contradiction, both these worms and humanity could never co-exist!

But that has not much to do with me... I should be thinking a way to escape here. If it was not because I could not accommodate both Old Jalopy and Fei Si in Han Jia, I would have just headed back to the fleet and pick up both of them, then leave this place with Rui Bing. It would not be hard when these worms could not see Han Jia at all.

Oh well...

Thought Ye Chong as he shifted his focus back to reality.

Back on Trash Planet, Ye Chong had several occasions with different mutated lifeforms and of course in Archipelago he had tasted beast stampede, the century event before, so he was practically an experienced monster hunter himself.

From his observation this far, he noticed the hierarchy among the worms, so technically there should be a leader, or a mother queen somewhere. From the premise, if Ye Chong could find out the leader, maybe things would change.

Hmmm...

?

That was when he discerned a silhouette flashing by through his eyes' corners.

Silhouette? He searched the camera immediately.

No way Ye Chong was seeing things. The sea of worms was green,

and a black silhouette had just passed by, Ye Chong was not color blind to have mistaken a random piece of meteorite.

It did not take long before Ye Chong discovered that silhouette. The darkish shape was traveling forward, much faster than the bristleworms. Without hesitation, Han Jia prompted its engine and chased after that silhouette disappearing in the deeper sea.

The distance was decreasing and Ye Chong began discerning the details of the silhouette.

It was ... Wait, what!

A large bristleworm... a large greenish black bristleworm!

The leader? Is this the leader?

Such thought popped up in Ye Chong's mind, his heart raced, according to his observation, the greener the worm, the darker the green was, the higher in rank, probably. And now this worm was much more greener and darker than all other minions he had ever seen, so it must be!

Ye Chong carefully piloted Han Jia. He must retain his stealth, he must not alert the leader worm.

While he was speculating if he was too lucky, the next scene had proven his theory.

The bristleworms around were opening a way for this sludgy-colored bristleworm.

Then, Ye Chong saw one random dark green bristleworm crawled out of the wave and followed the leader which seemed to be purposely slowing down, allowing contact with the follower. Soon, they made contact, and they had merged!

As Ye Chong hovered his way, he spotted more and more worms joined the leader, as if a magnetic force pulling them.

In no time the greenish black worm had been enveloped by the minions.

A conglomeration!

The fact was starkly clear! It was the miniature conglomeration of the gigantic mess Ye family's fleet had cleared before.

That would mean... the worm must be the queen!

Ye Chong decided to make a move, right away! Or he would only miss the golden opportunity to assassinate the queen.

Han Jia accelerated and emerged right behind the moving chunk.

The tentacles of Han Jia turned alive and sprung up.

On Ye Chong's projection, he could perceive a tiny gap in between the lump of dark green bristleworms.

Without hesitation, Ye Chong's skeleton tentacle made a stab!

He got it!

Yes! It wor—

Before Ye Chong managed to celebrate, a strong force sent Han Jia far, faraway.

Ye Chong did not panic as he tried to regain control of Han Jia.

The worms on the queen began squirming frantically. The living sea of worms turned dead out of sudden.

...

... ...

The bristleworms around Han Jia started moving rapidly, all towards Han Jia they hopped and pounced!

Oh no...

Chapter 434: Bristleworm Hunt II

It looked like Ye Chong had poked the wrong beehive.

The waves were tumbling! Millions of bristleworms flooded towards Han Jia. The green mists were rolling as restless the sea had gotten, becoming a whirlpool as attracting countless bristleworms from all corners to the center where Ye Chong was standing.

The sudden change of the sea had alerted the others.

Ye Yin could not control his emotion despite being the top pilot of Ye family, as astonishment was overflowing in his mind. The sea was struggling, the tiny conglomeration was seemingly shrieking somehow... Before he could realize, he began seeing scratches over the body of the dark green bristleworm.

Huh? Ye Yin flinched, what's going on?

The bristleworm covering the conglomeration somehow started cracking, as the number of scratches increased dramatically over its body.

The bristleworm was squirming in a more frantic manner, but its struggle was pointless, the cuts were still increasing like the engraving of curses haunting its entire entity.

In less than a second, the dark green bristleworm had gained about 21 new cuts. Ye Yin knew it was a nasty amount of cuts in such a brief window, it was a typical quick attack that was a chore to get rid of.

But who? Who was making such dramatic attack?

Ye Yin felt confused as he observed the projection carefully to see nothing else around the conglomeration.

At last, the bristleworm had a full convulsion and jerked twice before it collapsed into immobility.

Before Ye Yin could regain from his astonishment, the second, the third worm got attacked. The invisible killer was so efficient that even Ye Yin felt a little underwhelmed of himself. Also, clearly the target of the invisible killer had always been the conglomeration itself as he or she seemed to be slashing through the bristleworms-crowd outer layer.

Could it be?

Ye Yin had something in mind, as he turned on photon mode.

A petite and gorgeous skeleton mech was attacking the tiny conglomeration continuously.

It was him the whole time?

Ye Yin remembered that indifferent young man he had seen before. Certainly he was shocked, he might not have spoken to this young man personally before, but the bloodthirsty charm, the unspoken violence of this young man could never be forgotten upon glance!

Throughout the history, Ye family had conducted various researches on producing a full skeleton mech but they had never made any observable progress thus far. And now Ye Yin, the top pilot, was seeing a flawlessly crafted, fully functional skeleton mech with a splendid design and a unique set of weapon. No doubt, this must be a masterpiece!

Skeletons were perfect against the traditional detection system, that it was an eye-opener even to Ye Yin who had been to various battlegrounds.

Why is he here? Who exactly is he?

He could not help but to think about it.

But obviously it was not the time to be pondering these now.

The skeleton mech was spending all its strength attacking the lump.

Could it be....

Ye Yin saw the entire wave swirling over the skeleton mech aggressively. It was such a horrifying sight to see those larvae crawling every seeable space and engulfing the mech. Ye Yin remained calm, as he was still a brave and bold pilot after all.

If it was not for the sluggishness of those larvae, both of them might have been crushed into pieces.

The sea was waving, slowly but steadily.

Judging from the change of event, Ye Yin no longer had time and was left with two choices. One would be to leave the sea before the bristleworms blew up in hostility upon the combat order of the queen; another would be to kill that forming conglomeration before all bristleworms had arrived. The first plan was feasible as he could escape safely in time with his speed. The second plan would kill that chance for him as the place would turn imaginably inescapable when all bristleworms had clogged the entire course here.

Ye Yin made up his mind in a brief while!

The Spikedrops connected themselves from one end to another, forming a chain like a dark lightning and zapped into the conglomeration ahead.

In the meantime, Ye Chong was watching the lump before him.

The queen was completely embraced within the layer of bristleworms. Ye Chong could only see the fleshes of those dark green worms, the sight of the queen was imperceptible at the moment.

Ye Chong was almost certain however, that the greenish black silhouette was the queen in fact. It was no longer a hypothesis, the queen must be the queen.

Ye Chong had no better plan than killing the queen. That was the only thing he could do being all alone, though he could not

imagine the outcome. Still, who cares! What other choices he had anyway?

Without hesitation, Han Jia raised its "lance" like the mythical paladin and charged towards the foe!

Well, Ye Chong did not really perceive medieval terms like "lance" or "paladin", even if he had been once exposed to history before, thanks to Shang. He was not sure if people had done this before, if he was the paladin, but it was all for survival!

It was not only for his survival, but also for Rui Bing, Old Jalopy, and Fei Si! They were the reason for his reckless-looking action! They were the one thing worth risking for!

His slightly hollow face was looking colder than usual, like a statue made out of ice, as he stared upon the projection in the dark, with his hands dancing into stack of afterimages above the interface.

All tentacles of Han Jia started swaying, with the the pair of daggers brandishing quickly.

The body of the bristleworms were generally 6 to 7 meters in diameter. Yes, they were rather too large to take critical damages by a tiny dagger.

Only if these bristleworms never had immunity towards energy-based firings or Ye Chong would just toss a few compressive bombs and blow them up.

The vitality of these bristleworms was great, that they did not seem hurt despite the dense cuts over the body.

Ye Chong was agitated, as the barrage intensified!

If 10 cuts did not work, I'll just do few tens more!

Ye Chong's hands sped up.

That was what happened on the other side when Ye Yin watched the cracking action on the covering bristleworms.

Han Jia made a fancy swing and pulled distance away from the conglomeration to perform a speedy thrust!

Han Jia could not accelerate to the maximum due to the limited space that allowed travel, but the attack was significant as it made a giant dent on the covering bristleworm. The bristleworm fell off in pain.

Ye Chong was inspired, as the instinct of the battleground had given him an idea. He pulled the lever and lifted Han Jia in the air again. Thup! It crashed into another bristleworm.

There was a little twist this time, Han Jia was holding the dagger and had stabbed it deep into the body of this bristleworm. Before the worm could take any action, Han Jia made a rapid flight across its body, making a clear cut from the head all the way to the tail. If only Han Jia's dagger was longer, Ye Chong could have made a deeper slice of ham out of this thing.

Due to the deep wound, the bristleworm could not help but to curl up and fell off tumbling in pain at the side.

Everything went as expected.

That was practically what happened when Ye Yin watched the diamond cuts over that bristleworm on the other side. Ye Yin was stunned and could not help but to compliment the agility of the boy.

But efficiency-wise, in reality, Ye Chong might not be as great as Ye Yin assumed since Ye Yin was the one with a mech enveloped in floating Spikedrops which seemed to penetrate anything while providing seamless control. Those were something Han Jia could never compete. To defeat a bristleworm, all Ye Yin needed to do was to make those Spikedrops pierced into the body and cause destruction inside, unlike Ye Chong's Han Jia which required all the momentum and brute-force he could muster. Ye Yin was able to kill the bristleworm so, but Ye Chong could only injure it at most. It was undeniable as Ye Yin's Spikedrops were literally a

meat-shredder, no worm could have ever survived that!

Throughout the whole process Ye Chong had never noticed the one extra mech at the opposite, since his vision was limited by the scope of photon mode detection. If it was not for unique entities like Ye Chong's skeleton mechs, the photon mode visual would have been long terminated in use.

Ye Chong's hands did not stop. He knew there was not much time left. He must eliminate the queen before the larvae arrived as backup. He did not even have the time to take a glance at the coming larvae behind.

His brain was surprisingly calm as he calculated the angle and direction of his every slash and stab. Another bristleworm had fallen! Then the next! The next after!

Ye Chong began perceiving a thin darkness within the layers of bristleworms. He knew it was working as his hands accelerated.

Meanwhile, Ye Yin noticed the acceleration and reinforcement of the skeleton mech's attack. Without hesitation, he also jumped into intense action. Wise people do think alike, after all. They always would catch on something upon a simple glance or gesture.

Ye Yin presumed a discovery made by the boy.

The row of two dark green bristleworms was revealing a clear lining of darkness.

Han Jia backed out, which Ye Yin went stupefied of.

He's planning to run? At this point?

In the midst of Ye Yin's bewilderment, the butterfly had reappeared once more as Han Jia spread its colorful pair of wings. Before Ye Yin could react, like a launched arrow, Han Jia zoomed towards the conglomeration.

It was like a rainbow.

A twilight of the aurora.

It was so glaring that Ye Yin covered his eyes a little.

Meanwhile Ye Chong was staring at that thin lining between the bristleworms on the projection. He got to focus and act fast! His hands moved vigorously, at a threatening speed that the air inside the cabin was vibrating along with his fingers! Ye Chong opened his eyes wide, as adrenaline tinted crimson on his pale cheeks.

Now!

The afterimages ended as his hands returned to the control panel. One last button!

Han Jia the petite had somehow transformed into a bomber as suicidally it performed an epic dive towards the amalgamation.

Right before contact, the petite mech finally revealed its deadly torn, the dagger it trusted that stabbed right into the thin gap between bristleworms.

Thump.

Ye Yin somehow could hear the sound despite the lack of air in the space.

Han Jia skimmed quickly over the two bristleworms.

And after Han Jia had moved away, the gap was squirting the dark fluids of the entity within!

Chapter 435: A Silent Retreat

There were carcasses everywhere in the pathway.

The occurrence just now was too bizarre to even be reminisced, as the expression of people froze when viewing the green sea. The last scene was haunting them, as if imprinted in their head, as they felt their thumping heart still at their throat.

The thrashing sea of worms had turned lifeless all of a sudden.

Things always look bizarre to people if there seems to be a lack of transition between the move and still. And certainly the event a moment ago was more than comprehensibly bizarre to their senses. Their heart was cold as blood seemed to have stomped the brake heavily in the bloodstream. The bizarreness of the scene was one-of-a-kind, never-before-seen in their life.

A dead sea of worms was absolutely more horrifying.

People stayed bewildered till the first carcass flowed out of the green mist, then they realized all bristleworms had been dead.

How did they die? Nobody knew!

What exactly happened in the sea? Nobody knew!

Those were the mysteries that remained unexplained in the mind of the people, not even those pilots of Ye family who managed to escape the dying sea could give a proper explanation as confused they looked as well. They did see more things than most people in the sea and no way they could forget it for the rest of their life - an entire space of worms died in wave at once, it was a grand mass suicide.

Rui Bing was standing on top of Darvill and nearly collapsed upon seeing Han Jia returning in one piece. She finally got to relax. Darvill was well taken care of, not even a scratch could be seen.

Among the entire fleet, only Ye Yin and Ye Chong knew the context of the death of bristleworm sea. It was a very brief war, that Ye Chong actually presumed that he had done a good job being low and unnoticed, yet in actuality Ye Yin had seen his every action.

Ye Chong never wanted to be given the attention, especially under a period like this.

So he withdrew himself quickly after that, before Ye Yin could catch up with him. Ye Yin would love to know at which ship the mysterious skeleton mech was hiding but he discarded the thought soon after, since the amalgamated army of the three aristocrats was simply too gigantic to perform a search. Moreover, such action would only trigger the hostility in the other families. Most importantly, he did not have the time. The journey must go on, before his ride melted into void.

The fleet had regained its liveliness as the crewmembers started moving on with the next phase of their plan. Unlike before, fear and panic were no longer visible on their faces, instead there were joy and laughter.

Ye Yin was ridiculously busy at the moment, being the top commander of Ye Family, he had to communicate with representatives of the other families to coordinate from time to time. Then there were tasks to be assigned to his crew, there was also a report to be written that he would need to calculate the casualties occurred in the process. He could have asked others to handle these trivialities, but well, the report would go to him for compilation in the end anyway.

Only when he could catch his breath, he would remember that beautiful skeleton mech, performing those impeccable and accurate strikes, calmly yet ferociously in an impaling force. And thinking of it would give him shivers of excitement coming deep from his heart all the time.

The excitement did not last however, as soon he would be engulfed by the large piles of documents and inquiries from his crewmen asking for permission.

Meanwhile, both Ye Chong and Rui Bing were sort of having a honeymoon on Darvill, with Old Jalopy and Fei Si. It was only natural when Ye Pang was the leader of the logistics department. They might no longer have any battery in the storage, but they at least could afford the finest wine from the last century and premium tea leaves from the other corner of galaxy. Old Jalopy and Ye Luo were hogging on the bottles of Chateau Lafite at night, while slurping Tieguanyin in the afternoon.

Sailors of the Darvill were overjoyed upon the sight of the exit, as they hugged each other celebrating their survival.

Once they passed the exit, they would arrive at He Yue.

The entire fleet was over the moon.

The sailors had been thinking of their home, especially after such a cruel war they had witnessed. They missed home, their families, the warm and cozy bed.

Shrieks of joy were heard in the ship the moment Darvill travelled past the exit.

Ye Chong, Rui Bing, Old Jalopy and Fei Si were all in one room. Well, Ye Chong called them there.

"We are leaving," said Ye Chong concisely.

The room was silent.

Fei Si opened her mouth... and she shut it back up.

There was no other timing better than now. Once they entered He Yue, the fleet would face another reformation, which meant a likelihood of commotion happening. It would be perfect to leave.

"W-w-whatever. hiccup You saved our lives after all hiccup," muttered Old Jalopy who was a little drunk he after that epic

drinking with Ye Luo last night.

Ye Chong and Rui Bing both left the room after giving a glance at Old Jalopy and Fei Si.

"Grandpa..., " Fei Si insisted expressing something but Old Jalopy opened his eyes wide, he was pretending the whole time. Old Jalopy looked at Fei Si's slightly sunken cheeks, sighed, "Girl, stop thinking. The world is no longer peaceful. It'll only get messier over time... Just go with him... You still have years to come by, it's more important to survive."

Fei Si's eyes reddened upon his words as she burst into tears within Old Jalopy's embrace.

"Sigh..." Old Jalopy gave a gentle pat on Fei Si's back.

... (At the other spot) ...

"So, you're leaving?" asked Ye Luo softly.

Ye Chong nodded.

"Right, it is a good timing to leave in fact," nodded Ye Pang approvingly.

Ye Luo remained silent for a moment, "Let me show you something." And he suddenly prompted the hologram projection in the room.

It was an intergalactic layout of He Yue galaxy, with a few red spots on it.

"It just came from our family. Did you see those red spots? Something happened..." His voice got low, "Spatial distortion."

Ye Chong looked at the projection in blank dismay.

"It's just a friendly reminder from me," elaborated Ye Luo, assuming that Ye Chong received a shock of his news. "You should not be traveling at these spots, it would be too dangerous. You probably didn't know, before the pathway was raided, we have already received several notifications on spatial distortion at

different places. We wanted to send our experts to investigate but things changed, the pathway got attacked. Our family was suspecting if these anomalies were somehow related with these unknown creatures..."

Ye Luo then walked to Ye Chong, with a sharp glare into his eyes, as word by word the warning went, "You can go wherever you want, I would not care less. But, never, ever, hit, your, path, to, these, places. They. Are. Dangerous."

Ye Chong stared at the projection.

And as mentioned before, reformation of fleet happened and it was truly a commotion. The galaxy was Xue Lai clan's territory after all. They did not intend to fight however, as they had received orders to shift all the military forces away from the zone, to show their respect towards the return of the formidable warriors and a sign of wanting peace.

That was when one gate of Darvill opened, as a small ship flew out quietly.

The reformation involved shuffling of spaceships. So in the midst of the commotion, no one noticed the departure of the little ship.

The ship weaved in and out of the moving spaceship and soon disappeared in the boundless space. The other ships were too busy heading back to their own family to take notice of the ship.

The little ship then accelerated, all according to plan. Surely, both Ye Luo and Ye Pang had already planned an escape path for Ye Chong's references. The path was one cleared out by the Xue Lai clan as a returning route for Ye family and Xi Feng tribe after the reformation, but well Ye Chong treaded it first.

The ship was supplied with sufficient batteries. Those were part of the supplies sent by the Xue Lai clan for Darvill that Ye Pang generously took a large box of them to Ye Chong.

Ye Chong once imagined the entrance to the pathway leading to

free space zone would be a remote zone as well. He never expected the three entrances to the pathway were surrounded by a lively space zone.

The few planets near Xue Lai's pathway were a collection of well-developed business zones where flocks of vessels would come for trades all the time. Ye Chong got to admit that Xue Lai clan had a pretty tight mouth on this. No one had really heard of it.

...(Meanwhile)...

"Captain, we received an SOS signal from a lifeboat nearby," said one sailor on Risson the intergalactic long travel cruise.

"SOS signal?" frowned Captain Airi. All these years he had been working on the cruise, yet he had never heard of an actual accident of spaceship in this zone. He seriously wondered which greenhorn was leading the unlucky ship, that an SOS signal eventually arrived to his ears.

"Try contacting them. Ask them what is happening," ordered Captain Airi.

"They claimed to be traveling at long distance the first time and seemed to have lost contact with their mothership on an unattended control."

I knew it. Greenhorns these days... Sigh...

"Escort them into the ship. But, remind them, they would have to pay if they broke anything in the process," said Captain Airi helplessly.

The captain would not be low on guard if he was receiving the same signal at other space zone. But really, the space zone he was traveling now was indeed a secure one, that it sounded strange to him to have received an actual SOS signal from an accident. He had been traveling at this course for 10 years, and had heard of the same story a few times, that the newbies could not handle their ship well and requested assistance.

Ships today... sigh... what happened to standards?

But I can't be merciless and turn them down, can I?

Thought the kind captain.

Chapter 436: Dragon-Tiger Match

Zhang Yu looked out the window into the starry sky, feeling a little bored. Long space travels were dry and uninteresting, especially to someone like him, who had lost interest in a great deal of things.

The ship's broadcast system suddenly came online. "Attention all passengers! Attention all passengers! Due to unforeseen circumstances, we will be redirecting our flight to Planet Yi Ju. We apologize for the inconvenience!" The broadcast went silent after that.

Zhang Yu's face twitched. They were hijacked! That idea immediately came to him, and he activated the comms device on his wrist almost instinctively.

The ship went silent for a moment, and then all hell broke loose! The passengers looked furious. Some of them even demanded to see the Captain. However, Zhang Yu noticed that a few people in the crowd kept their calm, with wary looking eyes.

Zhang Yu felt a vibration from his comms device. He lifted his wrist to have a look, and felt even more troubled. His comms device registered nothing. All communication signals onboard the ship were disabled! However, he was slightly comforted by the fact that his distress message had been sent out. Now, he could only hope that his all-powerful friend could help him.

Without being obvious about it, he deleted the distress message from his comms device as he sat quietly on his seat. Any overreactions right now could potentially invite trouble.

In the captain's cabin, Ye Chong was with Rui Bing, Old Jalopy and Fei Si. Beside them, an innocent looking alloy chair laid broken on the floor. Everyone in the ship looked shaken. They looked at the four of them with terrified eyes, especially at Rui Bing. With her icy beauty, she was like as terrifying as a cannibal

to the crew. A moment ago, Rui Bing had lashed out with a kick without warning, breaking the alloy chair into its current sorry state.

Captain Airi coughed. "Cough, cough. Everyone, let me remind you that while you are strong enough to force us to reroute our flight, I urge you to reconsider. This flight route is under the protection of the Xue Lai Clan. If we really reroute our flight, I believe that the Xue Lai Clan will react accordingly." His words were meant as a warning - they should really reconsider!

"Thank you for your warning," Ye Chong answered politely. It must be said that Ye Luo and Ye Pang's plan was quite effective.

Looking at the young man's indifference, Captain Airi knew that he would not change his mind. Without any other choice, the Captain gave his orders to the crew members, "Reroute our flight. Our destination - Planet Yi Ju!"

Ye Chong went to the control panel, and immediately shut down all external communications. Since they were still in Xue Lai Clan territory, news of the ship being hijacked would have devastating consequences.

"Please arrange for accommodation for my companions, thank you." Ye Chong spoke politely to the Captain.

Little Rock entered the virtual world as he usually did.

Now, his daily job was to get intel through the virtual world. As the virtual world node laboratory was built, his power increased tremendously. He was now the main source of intel for their group. Little Rock's abilities improved quickly. His extraordinary computational skills allowed him to explore freely in the world of mathematics as he learned more and more. He was not a true super duper Maverick! Even Mu and Shang mostly left this matter to him.

Huh?

Little Rock looked at the distress message he had just received in surprise. Skytreader was one of his few friends in the Maverick circle. He was a well established Maverick, and one of the few Mavericks in the He Yue Galaxy who worked solo.

What happened to him?

Little Rock quickly opened the message.

He can see that the message was pre-crafted. There was no other information. This meant that his situation must be dire. The man must have thought of him when in whatever critical situation he found himself in. Somehow, Little Rock felt touched by this knowledge.

However, he quickly dismissed the sentiment. As a Maverick, he must first and foremost be calm.

He must move quickly!

First, he must find where the message was sent from. Five minutes later, he was able to locate the sender.

Sender location: the Long Distance Travel Starship, Victoria.
Message origin location: near Sol Latitude.

Three minutes later, everything there was to know about Victoria was displayed before Little Rock, including its internal schematics, which Little Rock dug out from the Starship Management Office.

"There must be some accident," Little Rock thought quietly.

Sol Latitude's virtual world was particularly well defended, and this surprised Little Rock! He was no longer the amateur of old, and he knew what this special kind of defense meant.

Could it be ...

However, this was obviously not the time to explore Sol Latitude's mysteries. Sol Latitude might be well guarded, but that could not stop a Maverick like Little Rock.

The landing dock did not have records of Victoria's landing. According to their schedule, the ship should have docked at the planet by now. This meant that something had happened to Victoria.

Was the ship hijacked?

Little Rock frowned.

Victoria's external communications were cut off. Little Rock tried to reach the ship in vain.

This did not discourage Little Rock. On the contrary, he was feeling excited about the fight ahead! Not giving up was one of the main reasons he had become a powerful Maverick. He was rigid, but strong and determined, never one to cower before obstacles.

"Then, a battle it is!" Little Rock's tiny frame radiated with a strong battle intent!

"Boss ... Boss ..." A young man stumbled into the room, speaking panickedly.

"What is it?" The one called Boss was a middle aged man, and he frowned at the interruption.

"Someone ... Someone hacked into our regional network. We lost all our holographic feeds!" The young man gulped repeatedly as he stuttered out his words.

"What?!" The middle aged man could no longer stay calm. He pushed away his desk and abruptly stood up, flabbergasted.

On the holographic screen, one could see that a Maverick was making every move with speed and calmness. Like most traditional swordsman, every move was clear but unbeatable!

"Dragon-Tiger Match, what are you up to?" The middle aged man muttered to himself.

In Xue Lai Clan's virtual world control center.

The air was thick with tension. Every working staff wore a grim

expression.

"First defense node failed ..."

"Second defense node failed ..."

"Enemy is hacking the third defense node... Third defense node failed ..."

A beautiful feminine voice delivered the words that sounded like they came from a nightmare. Every one of them in the center looked pale.

"Surveillance system is lost!" This sentence hammered down heavily on their hearts!

On the holographic screen, a handsome tiger-man and a lovely dragon-lady were intimately clinging onto each other in an intensely suggestive way, but everyone looked at the image with nothing but fear in their eyes.

"Dragon-Tiger Match, what are you up to?"

On that day, a powerful Maverick called Dragon-Tiger Match shocked the entire He Yue Galaxy. In just three hours, 35 planets including Sol Latitude at the center lost their surveillance systems.

The arousing image of the handsome tiger-man and dragon-lady entwined together spread across the entire He Yue Galaxy.

Dragon-Tiger Match was actually Little Rock, but the symbol was designed by someone else.

According to tradition, every Maverick would have their own symbol. Once, when Little Rock, Mu and Shang discussed about it, Shang had volunteered to design his.

In this respect, Little Rock was remarkably similar to Ye Chong - he left it all to Shang.

Hence, by drawing inspiration from "Fiery Battle of between Dragon and Tiger" and "Playboy", Shang presented his design of the symbol in all its glory, and called it the Dragon-Tiger Match.

When Zhu Ling saw the symbol, she had blushed deeply for a whole 30 seconds. The beautiful dragon-lady looked very much like Zhu Ling, while the handsome tiger-man looked like Little Rock.

Little Rock was satisfied with the design. He may not know much about aesthetics, but he did know that this symbol would only take up a bare minimum of resources from the photon processor.

From then on, the enticing Dragon-Tiger March had become Little Rock's very own symbol.

Little Rock did not have time to think about how impressive his work was. He alone controlled many, many holographic feeds, all the while fending off waves of counter attacks from the other side. There was no time to think about anything else.

The counter attacks were strong!

Little Rock was sweating all over. The neverending waves of counter attacks exhausted him, but he held on.

An event of such a huge scale had caught the attention of all the Mavericks in the He Yue Galaxy! Many of them were keeping a close eye on the proceedings. However, every Maverick was astonished by the power of Dragon-Tiger Match. Little Rock's strength was deeply etched into their hearts.

Found it!

Little Rock felt encouraged. One of the holographic feeds had Victoria in it.

Little Rock quickly accessed his star chart, and began to analyze Victoria's trajectory to deduce its destination.

Just when everyone was trembling in excitement at this unprecedented war in the virtual world, Dragon-Tiger Match did something else that once again demonstrated his prowess!

Suddenly, Dragon-Tiger Match vanished into thin air, gone from

the virtual world in an instant. No matter how hard they looked, no one could find him. When the control center staff members regained control of the surveillance system, they found to their surprise that all their information, including voice passcodes, were unaltered from before. Dragon-Tiger Match had left without leaving a single trace!

The incident that sparked a lively conversation all around had started without warning, and ended without just as abruptly! People began to guess the identity of this Dragon-Tiger Match, but more were talking about the alluring symbol of the dragon-tiger couple.

It was said that long after the incident, He Yue Galaxy's many large pornographic magazine publishers tried hard to find out who the mysterious Maverick was. They hoped to obtain the rights to use the symbol. From a professional point of view, using the symbol as the cover of a porn magazine was absolutely classic!

However, the perpetrator behind it all, Little Rock, was now staring fixedly on the holographic screen that displayed the flying starship, Victoria!

Chapter 437: Reunion I

The atmosphere onboard the starship, Victoria, was filled with fear, but aside from the initial announcement, no one else had appeared to explain the situation. The passengers and crew members were completely separated, and all external communications were blocked.

Zhang Yu smiled bitterly at himself. To think that he was unlucky enough to be involved in an incident like this in one of his very rare outings! As a Maverick, he rarely stepped outdoors. When was the last time he ventured outside? A year ago? Or was it a year and a half? He could not tell.

Looking at the panicking crowd around him, Zhang Yu twitched his mouth. He did not look as ordinary in the virtual world as he did now. While he was not exactly as powerful as that friend of his, he still had a reputation of his own. He had his own share of experience in danger, so it was not too hard to remain calm at this point.

He thought of his mysterious friend, his only hope in this situation. The truth was, he knew that it was futile. Who knew when his friend would be in the virtual world? That person had always appeared and vanished without warning, never giving any indication of the time and place to meet. Perhaps his wait would continue on forever. Moreover, even if his friend saw his message, what could his friend do? No matter how strong he was, he was only a Maverick!

Mavericks were often described as almost invincible beings, but as a professional himself, Zhang Yu understood the limits of a Maverick's powers.

Mavericks are not Gods!

Little Rock bit on his lip as he stared at Victoria on the holographic screen. Zhang Yu was right. Mavericks are not Gods.

At the moment, Little Rock had no idea of what to do. Should he ask Mu or Shang for help? Mu or Shang would be able to deal with the ship, but given where it was right now, even the mech would be powerless to do a thing.

Just when Little Rock was feeling hopeless, the photon processor began to beep.

A message? Little Rock felt encouraged. If there was a message, then it would be possible to hack into the starship's photon processor. Once he hacked into Victoria's systems, he would know what was happening there.

Finally, they were far away from Sol Longitude. According to the information from E Pang, the dominant force in this area was not the Three Aristocratic Families. The journey was smoother than expected, but Ye Chong was not happy because of it. On the contrary, he looked perturbed.

Ye Chong stared at the star chart on the holographic screen, lost in thought. He had been at it for some time now.

Rui Bing quietly stayed by his side, looking at him with concern. Finally, she asked, "What's the matter? You've been staring at it for so long."

Rui Bing interrupted Ye Chong. He broke off his thoughts and turned to Rui Bing, saw the concern in her eyes, and found himself moved by it. He quickly replied, "It's nothing. Don't worry about me."

"Who's worrying about you?" Rui Bing looked abashed, but she quickly reverted back to her cold self, asking plainly, "I'm just curious, about why you're staring at the star chart these few days."

Captain Airi immediately became alert.

These four people were unlike other normal pirates. They did not give off the aura that pirates normally would.

While their leader, the cold young man, had always showed calmness, Captain Airi could tell that he was worried about something.

The young man and the woman in the white training garb had stayed in the bridge most of the time. The young man was acting weirdly, always staring off into the star chart on the holographic screen.

Rui Bing was overjoyed to see Ye Chong back to his old self, but she kept her expression guarded as she asked intentionally, "You still haven't tell me where planet Yi Ju is."

The change in topic by the young lady disappointed the Captain.

"Planet Yi Ju ... It's here!" Ye Chong pointed on a spot on the star chart.

"So it's here," Rui Bing followed Ye Chong's finger and looked. Abruptly, she gasped in surprise, and turned to look at Ye Chong with disbelief in her eyes.

Ye Chong unusually shrugged and said, "You know now."

Captain Airi looked at planet Yi Ju, wondering what was special about it. Yi Ju was far from its neighbours, and economically stagnant. The Captain had never been there before.

"That's the place they talked about ..." Rui Bing's voice was trembling.

"Yes." Ye Chong nodded.

"Then let's not go there!" Rui Bing suddenly raised her voice, sounding anxious.

Captain Airi watched in surprise at the young lady in training garb. The young lady had showed tremendous self control these few days. When she first demonstrated her abilities, Captain Airi felt certain that a powerful combat expert like her must be equipped with an equally strong mind as well. What could possibly

startle such a powerful combat expert?

However, after staring at planet Yi Ju for a long time, he could not figure it out.

"I'll explain to you when we get there." Ye Chong felt that it was difficult to explain to Rui Bing for now, and could only tell her so plainly. Rui Bing bit her lips and did not say anything further.

She finally understood what Ye Chong was thinking about these few days.

When Ye Chong pointed out Yi Ju's general whereabouts, she realized that he was actually referring to one of the places with spatial instability that Ye Luo and Ye Pang had warned them against.

However, she said nothing of it. She knew Ye Chong. He would never go there without good reason.

Ye Chong suddenly turned to Captain Airi and asked, "Where are we now?"

Captain Airi pointed on the star chart, "Here."

They had successfully left Xue Lai Clan's territory. Ye Chong heaved a sigh of relief. He then turned to the photon processor, accessing the ship's comms system and tuned to a communications channel.

Sang Pu stood by the docking zone, watching the starships go by, his heart filled with pride. The base was no longer what it used to be, having been expanded both in size and scale. The starships that were docked here were either flying goods in to the base or preparing their journeys to Archipelago. The latter were all the Tribe's transport ships.

The Sang Tribe had began its slow move outwards, but this was a very long process. The Sang Tribe had lived in the Archipelago for

far too long that it was difficult to fit in to modern society. This transition period was unavoidable, but Sang Pu believed that the Sang Tribe would most definitely be returning to He Yue Galaxy in the near future.

As it was, there was internal debate on whether the Tribe should join the outside world. With the Collision mechs, the Sang Tribe would be undefeatable in Archipelago. In fact, Archipelago would be completely under their power. If they stayed in Archipelago, the Sang Tribe members would be able to live a decent life.

However, the debate did not last long. Their saviour's plans were quickly executed stage by stage until the end. On this matter, the Sang Tribe was undivided.

Just then, Sang Pu's comms device rang.

He lifted his wrist to have a look, and found that it was a number he had not seen before. Sang Pu thought it odd. He may be the person in charge at the base, but he seldom showed himself in the outside world. Few knew of his existence. His comms device only had a few of the Tribe members' numbers.

The connection was made.

"Pu, it's me!"

Sang Pu stared at the familiar figure on the holographic screen displayed from his comms device, very much astounded!

"Sir ..." Sang Pu no longer looked so steady. He was so excited that words would not form.

Suddenly, Sang Pu broke off his trance. He leapt high up like an arrow unleashed, reaching the highest point in the base.

"Sir is back!!"

His loud, excited voice reverberated in the entire base!

People rushed out of their houses, running towards him. From high above, Sang Pu was like the center of a whirlpool, where all

the water flowed to and converged.

Ye Chong did not offer pleasantries, but instead said, "Prepare for battle!"

Little Rock went through the motions calmly, his expression rigid.

He had learned how to stay calm from Mu/Shang. His manipulations were flawless. As expected, he used only three minutes to hack into Victoria's control systems.

"Ah!" An exclamation of surprise alerted everyone onboard Coxcomb.

They all stopped what they were doing and headed looked towards Little Rock. Little Rock always give people an eponymous first impression of being as silent as a rock. He rarely spoke a word unless it was necessary. No one had ever seen Little Rock lost his composure.

Zhu Ling panicked as she quickly went to Little Rock and asked, "What is it ... What is it?" She looked anxious, unlike her usual cold and arrogant self.

Little Rock pointed at the holographic screen, unable to say a word.

Everyone's eyes followed to where he was pointing.

Bzzt bzzt!

The holographic screen before Ye Chong suddenly rippled violently. Sang Pu's image became blurry and unrecognizable.

"Who is it?" Ye Chong asked in a low and cold voice. He knew what was happening. Someone had hacked into the ship's control system! When Mu/Shang were with him, they had always used this trick to get them out of danger.

"Ye, it's me!"

Chapter 438: Reunion II

In that moment, Ye Chong felt thunderstruck. He froze for while, but this momentary calmness was immediately broken by a surging warmth from deep down, that spread out to every inch of his skin.

"Mu ... Shang ..." Ye Chong still sounded calm, but everyone in the Captain's cabin noticed the unusually strong emotions in his voice. Captain Airi looked at the young man with disbelief. He never imagined that the apathetic young man could actually speak with such rich emotions.

The holographic screen was silent for half a minute, then a one-armed mech came into view. Even when missing an arm, the blue and white alternating lines on the mech were gorgeous and elegant.

"It's me!" Mu and Shang's electronic voice made it hard to discern the emotions behind it. His blue, bionic eyes flashed excitedly. Of course, a mech's emotions was a tricky subject.

"I finally found you!" Ye Chong breathed a long exhale in relief.

The reunion with Mu and Shang brightened his mood from thinking about the problems at planet Yi Ju. He, Mu and Shang were much more than just normal friends.

However, be it Mu, Shang or Ye Chong, they did not like to waste time reminiscing on the past. Ye Chong quickly described his current situation to the mech.

"Understood. We will meet up with you as soon as possible. Estimated time of arrival is 15 days later, with an error margin of seven days." Mu or Shang did not give Ye Chong any advice, only briefly stating his time of arrival. Even so, Ye Chong was overjoyed. After being separated with the mech for so long, he had truly missed them.

Rui Bing stared at the one-armed mech on the holographic screen, and thought it looked familiar.

Mu suddenly spoke up, "Oh, Shang has asked to speak to you. It's not his time to surface yet, but given the circumstances, I have agreed to his request!"

In the next moment, the mech's voice changed abruptly. "Little Ye, hee, it's been too long! You're looking more and more handsome. Aha, so you've actually won over Bing Bing so quickly!" Shang's voice sounded just as naughty as he remembered.

Rui Bing's face instantly reddened.

Her blush made Shang even more excited. "Bing Bing, my dear, what stage are you at with our little Ye? How's it going so far? Err, I say, Bing Bing dear, you gotta be more proactive in some matters, our little Ye is just clueless all the time. Ah, you've gotten so huge, it's different from the numbers in my database, looks like it's time for an update. I gotta say, Bing Bing's maturing quite splendidly ..."

Shang was just blabbering at Rui Bing with so much excitement that Ye Chong was basically ignored.

Rui Bing was now blushing even more intensely.

Everyone in the Captain's cabin stared at the holographic screen in astonishment. They did not expect the mech's cold, mechanical attitude to undergo a complete shift!

Listening to Shang's constant blabbering, Ye Chong did not feel impatient at all. Instead, he felt a warmth enveloping him. Yes, very warm indeed.

On Yi Ju, the Papatte Mech Squad had become the dominating force in the area. Ever since the Papatte Mech Squad arrived in Yi Ju, the pirates nearby all vanished without a trace. Unlike other mech squads, the Papatte Mech Squad had never welcomed visitors. Even when Yi Ju's Governing Officer, Torres had asked

for a visit, they had firmly refused the man.

However, no one expressed any dissatisfaction in this matter, since the fact was that the Squad was just too powerful!

All their external affairs were handled by a man called Old Chief Guo.

All residents on Yi Ju knew that any mission given to the Papatte Mech Squad would be completed without a hitch. From the beginning, the Papatte Mech Squad had achieved an average success rate of 98 percent. Besides, it was rumored that the Papatte Mech Squad had strict discipline. Even locals in Terry City had never seen the mech pilots leave their base, much less interfere with local affairs.

The only thing that puzzled them was why a mid sized mech squad as strong as Papatte would choose to stay so far out in the universe. What's stranger was the fact that they only ever accepted missions in the vicinity. No matter how large the reward offered, they would always refuse missions far from Yi Ju.

Every once in awhile, there would be many resources shipped to the base. The large commercial fleets had given Terry City's economy a strong push.

The isolated mech squad was a mystery to all the local residents.

However, on this day, things changed!

The door that led to the Papatte Mech Squad's base had opened without warning. Countless odd looking mechs flew out to the skies. The peaceful base was suddenly filled with activity.

All the areas around Yi Ju came under control of the mech squad. All starships and mechs were ordered to stay aground. In one day, Yi Ju was plunged into a state of emergency.

Torres had been sweating nervously since 8 o'clock that morning. The cool autumn weather suddenly felt annoyingly hot. He was already drenched in sweat all over. Sweat beads covered his fair,

chubby face. His tiny eyes were filled with terror and panic.

"What are they doing?" Torres gritted his teeth. When he first heard of the odd movements of the Papatte Mech Squad, he had immediately flew on his own starship to Terry City. After all, while the Papatte Mech Squad had remained low key during they stay, their dominance in the area was already established among the locals on Yi Ju.

The presence of a towering force in his area of governance was a huge problem for him. However, there was nothing he could do about it. Planet Yi Ju was secluded and economically backwards, with a low population. As a Governing Officer chosen by his people, Torres did not have much military power at his disposal. Besides, his job was mostly an empty title, without much to do.

Unexpectedly, the arrival of Papatte Mech Squad had made his life easier. Since their arrival, the pirates that appeared occasionally in the area had all gone without a trace. Besides, the Papatte Mech Squad seemed to practice tight discipline. Their members had never created trouble, and even helped maintain peace in the neighborhood. He had always thought well of them.

However, he had received a report from his subordinate today that the Papatte Mech Squad was performing a large scale operation. This shook him very much, since the mech squad become grown to become a local power that could no longer be ignored. Their every move would affect planet Yi Ju greatly.

Even so, he was not too worried. No one understood Yi Ju better than him. This place had nothing to offer, and besides, the Papatte Mech Squad had a clean track record.

He had wanted to meet the person in charge of external affairs, Old Chief Guo, for a chat to understand the situation. However, halfway through his flight, he had encountered the mechs from Papatte Mech Squad, despite his holographic screen showing nothing around his ship.

He was ordered to land immediately!

"The Squad has taken control over the airspace around planet Yi Ju! All flight vessels please land immediately! All flight vessels please land immediately! In five minutes, all aerial targets will be attacked! The five minute countdown begins now!" The cold voice of a man came through the comms, his emotionless delivery convincing Torres that should he failed to land his ship in time, the other party would attack him without hesitation! Given his position, of course Torres was able to grasp the gravity of the situation.

"Sir! Our holographic scanning systems show no targets!" A crew member reported with a voice that betrayed his fear. Torres could almost hear the man's teeth clattering together.

"In three minutes!" The cold and flat voice came through the comms once again.

The crew member shuddered.

Torres gritted his teeth, and forced his next words out, "Land immediately!"

The crew member seemed relieved to hear that. He maneuvered the ship to land as soon as possible, almost wishing they could just teleport themselves there!

Torres and his ship landed safely. Torres had wanted to speak with the Papatte Mech Squad pilots, but the man had left in his flying vessel immediately after another warning.

"If you go airborne again, we will shoot to kill without further warning! Please value your lives and cooperate! Thank you!"

Torres watched as the mech turned smaller and smaller in sight, until it finally vanished in the sky. He looked grim as he gave the order, "Prepare our land transport, we must reach Terry City as soon as possible." Torres was no longer angry, but felt deeply troubled instead. What were they trying to do?

In just a short span of time, the entire airspace around planet Yi Ju was cleared of all but Papatte Mech Squad's mechs.

Papatte Mech Squad's unusual behavior had incited all kinds of rumors on Yi Ju. People were panicking. However, no one dared to step out and protest, since rumor had it that a starship was shot down for refusing their orders. Even though the Papatte Mech Squad had always maintained a low profile, the locals never doubted their strength.

Every resident of Yi Ju knew that something big must have happened. Or else, why would the low key Papatte Mech Squad suddenly behaved so aggressively?

What was going to happen next? Everyone waited with dread! Whatever large event that was about to occur, how would it affect the locals? Would their lives be changed forever?

Chapter 439: Reunion III

"You are Zhang Yu?" Ye Chong studied the man in front of him.

Zhang Yu was also giving Ye Chong the same look of assesment. He was a little perturbed. He was asked to the bridge alone, and this special treatment unsettled him. However, he believed that he had managed to maintain a calm impression. He nodded and said, "I am."

"Alright. From now on, you will be under our protection," Ye Chong stated plainly.

Zhang Yu stared in shock at the young man. The first thought that came to him was, had he encountered the legendary organization called the cartel?

Torres rushed to Terry City, just in time to see a starship making its landing. Around this starship were no less than a thousand of those weird flying vessels as its escorts.

Looking above from the ground, the fleet felt immense and powerful.

What an incredible show of power! Torres turned solemn. From the looks of it, the new arrival must be someone extraordinary. However, the starship did not seem to fit the story. Logically speaking, any person of status would have flown in a large high class starship, and not an average long distance starship like this one. This civilian starship would not have been enough to satisfy anyone of status, be it in terms of safety or comfort.

The scene was odd indeed. It was like seeing a large group of bodyguards in tuxedos carefully escorting a poorly dressed beggar.

As expected, the starship landed in the base of the Papatte Mech Squad. Torres no longer hesitated. He ordered his subordinates to drive him to the base.

Sang Pu, Sang Tie and Sang Ling all looked at Ye Chong, filled

with emotions.

"Sir ..." "Sir!" "... Sir ..." The three of them spoke up simultaneously.

Ye Chong looked at them, and felt a surge of emotions from within. Sang Pu was beginning to have the bearings of a leader. He stood there before him with a grace that befitted a man of power. Sang Ling had grown even more beautiful. Sang Tie looked just the same as before, but with a more mature composure.

"I'm back," Ye Chong said softly.

"Sir is back!" "Sir is back!" The base was filled with roaring cheers of joy. This man had taught them how to build Collision mechs, survive the Beast Stampede, and leave Archipelago. Everyone of the Sang Tribe loved him from the bottom of their hearts.

When he began to introduce the others in his company, there was a bit of an issue. Most of them were fine, but Ye Chong had no idea how to introduce Rui Bing.

"She is ..." Ye Chong tilted his head, unable to continue the sentence. A friend? He rejected the notion immediately.

"Welcome, Ma'am!" The sympathetic Sang Ling stepped up to give him a hand. The rest of the Sang Tribe realized the situation then. So it was Ye Chong's wife. No wonder he was embarrassed. They had all learned under Ye Chong, and since they called Ye Chong "Sir", it was only natural to call his wife "Ma'am".

Even with Rui Bing's steady character, she blushed deeply at the greeting.

Everyone's attention was focused on Rui Bing. They were all curious about the wife of their young teacher. Their intense gazes were directed instantly to Rui Bing, leaving Ye Chong completely ignored.

Sang Pu noticed Rui Bing's dilemma. He stole a glance at Ye Chong, smiled, and came forward to help Ye Chong and Rui Bing

out of their awkwardness. He raised his voice to the crowd, "What're you all standing here? Get to your jobs now. Sir is finally back, and he'll need his rest. Go on now, go on." It seemed that Sang Pu had won the confidence of the people. They all left with reluctance.

Sang Ling smiled at Rui Bing and said, "Young Ma'am, let's go."

News of the young teacher bringing back a lady as beautiful as a Goddess spread like wildfire throughout the entire base.

Before them, the area around Yi Ju was shown on a holographic screen, suspended in midair. A bright red dot glowed on the projection.

"This is one of the areas that is spatially unstable, and the closest one to us. It's not clear yet if these areas of spatial instability were the first signs before those creatures appeared." Ye Chong explained the situation briefly.

Everyone who heard Ye Chong describe the war at the Gateway entrance were horrified. They had heard of the Three Aristocratic Families. Their mech fleets were recognized as the strongest in the entire He Yue Galaxy. They even had the Three Aces leading the assault. Even so, the war had cost a staggering number of casualties. At the end of the war, only less than 20 percent of the combat force survived.

It was not hard to imagine the devastating aftermath.

Sang Pu and the rest looked grim, but none of them showed fear. Before meeting Ye Chong, they had all lived very dangerous lives, and were far more mentally resilient than the people in the He Yue Galaxy. Besides, no matter how strong this unknown lifeform was, it was only an animal, and the Sang Tribe had more than enough experience dealing with strange and unknown animals in Archipelago.

"That's a very dangerous area!" Sang Pu smiled bitterly, pointing at the holographic screen as he said, "Look, if those unknown lifeforms really appear here as Sir said, then our communications with the Tribe back home will be affected. If the creatures move towards the Calamitous Asteroid Belt, then our communications with the Tribe will be severed entirely!"

On the holographic screen, the red dot expanded rapidly, soon becoming a red zone. The red zone was like a red colored barrier, blocking the route between Archipelago and Yi Ju.

"War it is!" Sang Tie declared roughly. He looked at Ye Chong with fervent eyes. For someone as battle hungry as him, the recent peace was getting dull.

"War it is!" Sang Ling nodded in agreement. No matter what, they could not afford to have their communications with the rest of the Tribe severed. She looked at Ye Chong inquiringly.

Sang Pu said calmly, "I agree with them. War it is!" He looked to Ye Chong.

The three of them looked to Ye Chong.

"War it is!" Ye Chong said with determination.

Tores did not see Ye Chong, but was greeted by Old Chief Guo. Old Chief Guo himself was unclear of the situation, about how to explain things to Torres, so he chose to delay the man. Torres was getting anxious, but there was nothing he could do.

If the base looked busy in the short moment before Ye Chong's arrival, it was now positively crazy with activity.

Ye Chong called for Zhang Yu. The man's main duty was to establish contact with Mu and Shang's side. Yi Ju was technologically backward. The virtual world infrastructure here was almost nonexistent. Sang Pu and the others knew nothing about technology, and so never thought of working on it.

Nevertheless, Zhang Yu was knowledgeable enough in the basics

to build a signal emitter that could be connected to the virtual world from scratch, using bits of odds and ends. The equipment was still quite primitive, but since Mu and Shang would only arrive in about two weeks, it would not be an issue.

Ever since he knew of Ye Chong's relationship with Dragon-Tiger Match, Zhang Yu agreed to cooperate without delay. Besides, once he found that his job was to establish contact with Dragon-Tiger Match, he felt even more excited.

Sang Tie was sent to Archipelago. Since Yi Ju's combat force was not enough, his task was to bring back at least another 10 thousand men and resources for the war.

Old Jalopy was quick to dive into the work of improving the Collision mechs. He was a true expert in mechanics. His extreme working hours were shocking. On the third day, with his eyes red and bleary, Old Jalopy presented his first schematics with improvements. Everyone was impressed by his dedication.

Only people like Ye Chong and Rui Bing, who had seen the war up close, would understand why Old Jalopy would work so desperately.

In the end, Old Jalopy's experience in mechanics was worth far more than Ye Chong's amateur knowledge. His modifications were simple but efficient. After some computations by the photon processor, the maneuverability of the Collision mech was improved by 17 percent, and the energy efficiency increased by 9 percent. The statistics were trustworthy, having been provided by Mu himself. Even Ye Chong was impressed by the modifications. More importantly, the modifications to Collision mechs were not too extensive, and could be done in a relatively short time.

Ye Chong waited no longer. He gave the order to modify all the Collision mechs.

Monitoring work on the spatially unstable area never ceased. The entire monitoring equipment setup was obtained from a school

laboratory by Torres. Ye Chong began to like the man because of his assistance.

In fact, Torres had guessed the gist of the situation when he knew of the monitoring equipment, so he cooperated without delay. With Yi Ju's highest official cooperating, Ye Chong and his group could work more efficiently.

For example, the passengers onboard Victoria were left for Torres to handle. They were swiftly dispatched to the appropriate facilities on the planet.

War is money consuming.

Ye Chong could finally appreciate this expression. In just a few days, Sang Pu and the rest had used up a good part of their savings after so long. All the resources and equipment they used had to be bought. More importantly, all the many different kinds of high quality long range weapons were so expensive that Ye Chong balked at the price tags. The war was also going to happen in wide, open space, unlike the tightly confined battlefield at the Gateway entrance before.

Yi Ju was economically lacking, with nothing to spare. Torres could not offer much help in this regard.

Ye Chong watched as their savings depleted rapidly. It was a vexing problem, and he would have to figure out a way to overcome it.

Chapter 440: Prediction

It must be said that earning money had become a most difficult problem for Ye Chong right now. He was not ready with a solution for the problem, and could only wait for Mu, Shang and the others to arrive in the meantime.

Right now, he focused mostly on monitoring the area with spatial instability. Since they had no specialized devices to measure spatial stability, they could only use the simplest method of having patrol units monitor the area at all times.

Ye Chong had been there himself, but since he did not have any specialized measurement device with him, he could not find warning before the instability onset.

Planet Yi Ju's external communications were now under the control of the Papatte Mech Squad, and this was largely thanks to Zhang Yu. Communications between the other planets and Yi Ju were severed, and Yi Ju became isolated.

Due to the lack of natural resources, Yi Ju had never been under the scrutiny of the Three Aristocratic Families. This was a planet that even pirates would not care to plunder from.

Aside from that, the Three Aristocratic Families themselves were fully occupied. In fact, there were seven areas with spatial instability in the He Yue Galaxy. The Three Aristocratic Families had four within their territories. The Ye Family had one, and so did the Xue Lai Clan. The Xi Feng Tribe was unfortunate enough to have two within their territory. The other three areas with spatial instability were scattered around the He Yue Galaxy, and one of them was near Yi Ju.

The Three Aristocratic Families were now fully prepared for war. The Xi Feng Tribe had reacted the strongest, gathering nearly all their military personnel back to headquarters for defense. The war strategies deployed by the Three Aristocratic Families had alerted

the entire He Yue Galaxy instantly. The Three Aristocratic Families had kept the incident at the Gateways under wraps, so the outside world had no idea of the terrible war that they had just survived. Hence, the rumor mill began to churn out all kinds of theories. None of the Families spoke up. They offered no explanation of their behavior.

"Have you figured out what happened?" Xiao Wan stared at the man in front of her, asking with a stern voice. A black and smooth damask wrapped around her silhouette, showing her perfect curves. She had a silent quality about her that spelled power. The woman was like a black colored lily in full bloom, invoking a sense of dignity and elegance.

The middle aged man before her answered respectfully, "Not yet. The Three Aristocratic Families kept a tight lid on things. We have yet to uncover any useful intel." The man's looks were not look particularly outstanding, but his peaceful expression was soothing. His hands were huge and strong, covered with old calluses. It was Gray Valley's elite, Bei Guang.

Beside Bei Guang was a younger man in a simple outfit. He had thick eyebrows, and his shoulders were wide. His short hair was as rigid as steel rods. A short stubble made him look even more manly.

Xiao Wan turned to the younger man and asked, "Arwa, what do you think?"

The down-to-earth looking man was Gray Valley's famous genius tactician, Arwa!

Arwa pondered silently for a while before replying, "Recent activities of the Three Aristocratic Families are indeed strange. From their latest overall military formation, they are probably not trying to start a war with us, but defending themselves against someone else. Right now, we know nothing about their situation, and it's hard to figure out the truth behind their actions."

Xiao Wan turned on the photon processor in the room. Her fair and slender fingers pointed elegantly on the image that was projected onto the holographic screen. "This just came in from the Research Consortium. There's something interesting in the report, you can have a look at them." Xiao Wan smiled gently and invited them to view the report.

Bei Guang and Arwa exchanged glances. Interesting? The Young Miss rarely described anything as "interesting". The two of them quickly turned their attention towards the report.

The report was done professionally, but also in a straightforward manner. They finished reading the report quickly. After they were done with the report, they looked to each other again and noticed the fear in each other's eyes.

"In this report, areas seen with spatial instability in the He Yue Galaxy were identified. Coincidentally, four of these areas are where the Three Aristocratic Families have concentrated their forces. For now, we do not know if this is purely coincidental or otherwise. Unfortunately, Gray Valley also has an area with spatial instability.

By then, Xiao Wan was no longer smiling. The other two men also looked grim. They had finished the report. They had also noticed the coincidence that the Young Miss spoke of.

Xiao Wan looked faintly concerned. "If this is not a coincidence, the situation would be very serious. The Three Aristocratic Families must know something, or they would not be so nervous. The area with spatial instability is within the territory of the Koure Mech Squad. However, I doubt they can keep the situation under control. We need to start making preparations. Sigh, Gray Valley is too disordered. Many years of conflicts has damaged our own strength. I'm afraid that this time ..."

Xiao Wan did not finish her sentence, but both Bei Guang and Arwa understood her. Gray Valley's internal strife was unknown to

the outside world. Throughout history, only the invasion of the Three Aristocratic Families managed to bring everyone together. Xiao Wan and they only represented one of the many powers in Gray Valley. It would be hard enough to keep themselves safe from the impending threat.

In fact, Gray Valley's power structure was quite strange. Of all the organizations in the area, the Research Consortium was the most peculiar.

The Research Consortium treated every power and every mech pilot in Gray Valley equally. It was an entirely independent organization, not belonging to any other force in Gray Valley. The Research Consortium had set up a comprehensive set of exchange rules. Everyday, the Research Consortium would commission a good number of missions, such as finding some unique raw ingredient or obtaining classified information from some organization or aristocratic family. They did not care about the methods used to achieve these missions. As long as you can accomplish the mission, you will be rewarded with an appropriate number of credits.

These precious credits can be exchanged for knowledge of certain skills, or, for individuals, they could be exchanged for a top class mech that could not be found in the market. Any true resident of Gray Valley would know that the technology offered by the Research Consortium was at least on par with that of the Three Aristocratic Families!

Bei Guang's Sentry and Hua's Graycrawler were both from the Research Consortium. The Consortium was truly capable in technological matters.

In Gray Valley, the Research Consortium was the ultimate power, and no one would dare to cross them.

Xiao Wan pondered on the issue for awhile, then resolutely declared, "Order Hua to return immediately. Order all our men

who are stationed outside Gray Valley to return. We are now in the highest state of emergency."

"Yes, Ma'am!" Bei Guang and Arwa replied in unison. They knew that the Young Miss may look weak, but she was in fact quick to decide, with a mind of her own. Besides, she understood the bigger picture better than the two of them. The orders from the Young Miss had greatly surprised them, since they did not think the situation was so serious. Nonetheless, they obeyed without hesitation.

The reason for this was simple - the Young Miss was never wrong in her decisions. Her astuteness and wisdom had long impressed both of them.

As the two of them began to leave, Xiao Wan called on Arwa. She smiled and said, "Arwa, if everything went well, your new mech, Pioneer, should be in your room now. It's the latest product by the Research Consortium!"

Arwa was surprised and overjoyed to hear that. He kept his emotions hidden as he replied respectfully to Xiao Wan, "Arwa will definitely repay this favor, Young Miss!"

Any mech pilot would have probably dreamed of piloting a first class mech, much less a tactician prodigy like Arwa. As a normal citizen, Arwa had always flown in average mechs. No one would have thought that the prodigious Arwa was not born talented. In fact, he could not afford better mechs due to his financial situation. Hence, he could only use normal mechs to fight against others. There was nothing he could do but figure out tricks to win. As he spent more and more time strategizing, he slowly developed his reputation as an ingenious tactician.

Although he was proud of his reputation, any mech pilot would yearn to own a first class mech! However, the amount of credits required to exchange for a mech of that class from the Research Consortium was nearly impossible to achieve by any single

individual.

To think that this dream of his all these years was finally realized! On the other hand, he was touched by the importance the Young Miss had placed on him. Of all the mechs offered by the Research Consortium, Pioneer was ranked at number nine in terms of the number of credits required to exchange for it! Compared to this, Bei Guang's Sentry was only at the 45th, while Graycrawler was at 67th.

It was evident how powerful this mech was. How could he not be touched by the Young Miss?

Bei Guang had been in his position before, and understood Arwa's emotions right now. He patted the man's shoulders and smiled. "Why're you still standing around here? Go have a look at your new mech!"

Arwa chuckled out loud at that, and quickly rushed out of the room.

Bei Guang watched as Arwa disappeared from view, and could not help but laughed quietly himself. He turned to the Young Miss and bowed. He then left the room, closing the door behind him.

Now that she was the only one left in the meeting room, Xiao Wan sighed deeply and sat back down, massaging her temples with her fair hands. She did not look as calm or capable as she was just now. Now, she only looked tired.

Chapter 441: Coming Together Again

It was a lively sight inside the Papatte base, as it was the prelude of war. The Sangs were fearless against their upcoming challenge however. They looked extremely excited. It was the time where they felt their existence, as they had gotten used to war. War had already become the part and parcel of their life.

Ever since they got to Planet Yi Ju, it had been always one training course to another. There was not a time where the Sangs could actually jump into action. They had obeyed the orders without questions but inside them, there was a thirst to express their passion thoroughly in battle.

Even though they were unaware of the exact occurrence, it was blatantly obvious that something would be happening soon, and it would be big. Feeling pumped, they worked hard, like a bunch of hungry tigers loitering in the woods.

The one interesting "occurrence" in the base was about Rui Bing. "She's Teacher's wife?!" The screaming line had determined Rui Bing's fate being forever high-profiled among the Sangs, as curious they were of her, since no ordinary woman could have been the great teacher's wife after all.

And as they had expected, Rui Bing was no ordinary woman, as she demonstrated her strength and earned the Sangs' approval with her fist. It was still a place where fists would speak louder than words. You could not be teacher's wife if you were not as strong. Thought the Sangs, the simple thumb of rule of life.

Rui Bing liked the place a lot, since she would never have the time without a foe to fight. She was more of a true martial arts practitioner compared to Ye Chong who was the teacher. She held an entirely different prospect on martial arts mastery. That was probably why Ye Chong's style was more towards efficiency and experience while Rui Bing gave more attention on self-discovery

and breakthrough.

And... Mu/Shang had arrived!

That was one exciting news to Ye Chong, since it had been his ultimate goal of finding them ever since they lost each other. Ye Chong could not help but to reminisce the old days with Mu/Shang on Trash Planet.

Those were the good days...

Thought Ye Chong, his heart felt warm, as the corners of his lips raised.

He missed Mu/Shang, especially when they were the problem-solver upon encounter. The capability of Mu/Shang had been long imprinted in Ye Chong's mind, even when he was no longer that wimpy, incapable boy who lived with the trashes.

The meeting room went silent however, when the visual of the outside got transmitted. People were shocked upon the sight of a gigantic fleet sluggishly traveling towards them in the space.

There was an unspeakable tension when the Coxcomb was taking the lead.

It was a fleet made out of 1000 spaceships of different sizes. None of them was a warship, still the enormous fleet was a grand sight to behold.

Imagine this. In the dark boundless spaces, thousands of spaceships were traveling together in a dense formation across the milky way, in which one would have a length of 10 kilometers and the other having 5 kilometers at average. How impactful it was! They were like a school of sharks, swimming soundlessly in the space.

"Holy..., " muttered Guo the old chief upon the sight.

The others' expression was priceless too.

"T-teacher..., " Sang Pu gulped, as he mumbled his inquiry, "I-is

this that friend you've mentioned before...?"

"Mhm." Ye Chong nodded, "Yes it is." If it was not the Coxcomb that took the lead, probably Ye Chong would need a moment or two to confirm the identity. He was too familiar with the ship. Back on those days, Ye Chong gave in so much to finish the entire modification process of the ship. So no doubt he could identify it at first sight.

But Ye Chong got to admit, he was particularly curious of how Mu/Shang escaped the Red Sea. The fleet was so grand he could already imagine the commotion it caused when it appeared above Terry City.

Back when it happened, the sky of Terry City darkened completely. Torres nearly dropped his jaw when he saw it. Such force, thought he, which force exactly were they from? The fleet was a colorful mess with all different models of spaceship, obviously they were not from the aristocrats.

Torres did not have the time to figure that out however. The visit of the massive fleet was one problem demanded to be resolved immediately, since of where in Terry City could he find a parking space for their landing? The government of the city was almost non-existent and Torres was assigned to be the government itself, as he would supervise on all administration works being the supreme administration leader on Planet Yi Ju.

...(In the Meeting Room)...

"Ye, I hereby present you the digitalized wedding registration certification for both you and your wife. There are 36 styles and a large palette of colors to be chosen upon preferences. Legitimacy: 100%. Difficulty of execution: 0.03. Service would be provided without any charges. Furthermore, based on the trend of the climate changes on Planet Yi Ju since the last 30 years, it has been predicted that within the next 60 and 120 days, the biological reproductivity would be highly feasible, thus the best period of

offspring formation." Stated Mu. That was the first thing he said upon seeing Ye Chong. The mechanical voice was ringing a jaw-dropping fact.

Rui Bing's face reddened rapidly and Ye Chong was stupefied, "Mu..."

"It would be plausible to-JUST GET HER! Take out your vertical stick and start the ride, Ye! Ride on the horse, lady! Intimacy is the best policy!" Screamed the mechanical voice expressively, "Certainly. When it comes to the actual technique itself, mhm, Ye, I trust your ability, I have a grand library of information here." The change of tone was uncalled for...

"Shang..." Cold sweats were streaming on Ye Chong's face.

Luckily there were not many people in the room, or the embarrassment was unimaginable. Other than the group on the Coxcomb, there was only Ye Chong and Rui Bing. The Sangs were already sent to the outside before this, since... Mu/Shang was a little... too advanced for the primitives... It would also be better the lesser the number of people knew.

Mu/Shang did not change much physically. The wound from the left shoulder across the body to the waist remained as shocking as before. Ye Chong might have encountered all kinds of advanced models before, including the legendary trio of He Yue themselves, still, somehow something on Mu/Shang caught him. It was the grace and simplicity that no other advanced model could compete, even with that visible scar over the body. Ye Chong believed, if Mu/Shang was unblemished, he would look as good as the legendary trio.

Well, of course, not anybody could simply harass Ye Chong like that, not even Lian Yue the flamboyant genius.

"What had actually happened? Where did you guys get the spaceships? Did you guys seize a fleet?" asked Ye Chong. That was the only sound reason he could think of, though the chances were

slim. The Coxcomb was the only warship in the entire fleet. It was nearly impossible for one single warship to take control of the whole fleet. But then, there was Mu/Shang, both of them were the key to unlock the impossible. Who knows what trickery both of them had pulled off.

"This is our own spaceships. A total 902 of them. Most of them contained specific apparatuses and facilities for production," explained Qiu Man.

"Our own spaceships?" Ye Chong did not hold grudge against Qiu Man but her way of saying it was simply odd.

"Both Shang and I made a plan after losing you." Beeped Mu, "By utilizing the techniques in the database, we triggered a mass production under collaboration with other forces. These spaceships are most of the outcomes of the production. We had performed a transfer."

Ye Chong finally got a grip of the situation.

"Unfortunately, due to time constraint, we could only transfer a majority of them, which the remaining... had benefited Shi family," stated Qiu Man spitefully. Although she did not agree to the operation at first, she accepted her destiny and had invested a lot of her efforts. Nevertheless, the masterpiece had been given away, definitely she would be dissatisfied.

"Shi family? Which Shi?" asked Ye Chong.

"Shi family of the Tian Xing Cove."

"Oh, Shi Xin seemed to be there too," said Ye Chong as he thought back his past with Shi Xin and the Jin Gui tribe. Both Shi Xin and eldest son of the Jin Gui tribe had become his apprentice and... well they did pay a large sum of money for the apprenticeship. Thanks to that "tuition fee", Ye Chong could remember them well.

"Did you rob her?" Qiu Man looked shocked, like how Ye Chong thought of the same thing upon seeing Mu/Shang's fleet. The

others did not seem surprised as robbing her seemed like what Ye Chong would do.

"I did not. She came for me herself. Mhm, she did give some money," said Ye Chong.

"No way. Shi Xin seemed like a rational person from what I've heard. How would she make such a foolish mistake? Well, if she was on our side, then I do have some workaround to do. Heh, I'll make Shi Tianhu that old fox to spit out everything rightfully ours," said Qiu Man, looking charged as she pondered of her master plan on maximizing this new chess piece on the table.

"So Mu... how did all of you get out of the Red Sea?" asked Ye Chong.

Chapter 442: Good News & Bad News

"We used rubber. We quickly produced a massive amount of rubber that enveloped the entire body of the Coxcomb utilizing its cohesiveness which separated the metal surface from the sea," explained Mu/Shang. Now everything made perfect sense. Ye Chong could not help but to be amazed at the creativity of the solution. Although it sounded rather plain as concisely Mu/Shang described, the reality must be way more thrilling than Ye Chong imagined.

"Who thought of this?"

"Shang."

Oh it was Mu, as expected fro-wait, Shang?

The answer was beyond Ye Chong's expectation.

Ye Chong then opened up the entrance and called in the Sangs. There were several things to do. For starters, Sang Pu would lead the Coxcomb crew to the resting room. Sang Ling would be having a discussion with Qiu Man regarding the arrangement of the following tasks.

"There, Ye."

And finally Mu/Shang's dimensional keystone had returned to the front of Ye Chong's chest.

"Ye, what are you planning next?" asked Mu.

"Hmm..." Caressed the keystone pendant round his neck, "We'll talk about it after this," said Ye Chong.

"Mhm," Mu/Shang agreed.

The return of Mu/Shang was a boost to Ye Chong's forces. The facilities and apparatuses had been all transferred to safety almost immediately after that. Planet Yi Ju was a planet neither rich with resources, nor crowded with population, but it was a planet

abundant with free lands however. Miles and miles of land was under the ownership of the Papatte Squad.

And an industrial area was then found not far from Terry City a few days later. It was a medium-sized area that had included production line of all weaponry and accessories, processors and laser launcher. You could even find machines producing the valve pieces for mech hydraulic stabilizer and the keel of a medium spaceship. As long as they got the resources, they could produce almost anything.

This was when Mu/Shang shone with his computational power. The running production lines were forming a complete circuit of mass production. In other words, such industrial area was already capable of mass-producing complete mechs and spaceships, as well as a few of other end-products.

The industrial area was livelier than ever the moment it was fully established. Tons of laser firing devices were first to be produced since Planet Yi Ju lacked such type of offense the most. The team had to allocate most resources on ranged weapons since most of Ye Chong's mechs were close-combat models, other than Mu/Shang. And none of these models could wield a manual firearm efficiently in the battlefield.

So they chose to produce these automatic laser firing devices. Even though such device lacked accuracy, it could achieve a 100% accuracy as long as it fired in mass with the other devices - perfect for tower defense.

Furthermore, Mu/Shang had brought a few spatial monitors which could be a big help in observing unstable area in the space, allowing Ye Chong to make the necessary move when distortion occurred.

The Sangs were ever-moving even when they were not assigned to the usual patrolling tasks. After Ye Chong's last encounter with bristleworms, he outlined a charging training course for them.

The communicative facilities had also been renewed, now under Little Rock's supervision with Zhang Yu as the assistant. The Virtual World server on Planet Yi Ju had reached an astonishingly high level of security now with both of them.

Ye Chong had been in the commander's room most of the time. According to the data he had been receiving, the unstable space zone ahead was further destabilizing at an alarming rate - that was not a good sign for everyone. The atmosphere of the commander's room was grim as most people's expression. If the spatial destabilizing rate had reached the limit way before the arrival of Sang's reinforcement, what could happen to them?

... (Meanwhile)...

"What? You found Xin?" shouted Shi Tiancheng as he sprung from his seat.

"This...", muttered Uncle Hua as he passed the report carefully to the leader of Shi family, "the report of our intelligence from Virtual World. It's a letter. The sender claims to know the whereabouts of Lady Shi... but they are only willing to tell it when you speak to them personally." Uncle Hua was Shi Xin's personal bodyguard since childhood, there was strong bond between them.

Shi Xin seemed to have completely vaporized from the world ever since she joined the apprenticeship under those Jie experts. Shi family took all the efforts in searching her, yet not even a clue was found. Shi Xin was Shi Tiancheng's daughter, one with the highest hopes too, among all his descendants. Shi Xin had never disappointed his father. She was decisive and capable, a very careful person who rarely made mistakes in her work. Her charisma had somewhat pushed her to become the unsaid leader among the youngsters. Almost everyone in the Shi family presumed her to be the next leader of the family. Shi Xin's decision of joining the Jie expert was never an issue for Shi Tiancheng, for he was also curious of these mysterious fighters, but never once he thought Shi Xin would step into the dungeon herself straight off

without giving a thought or two. Such move would only be deemed as reckless in the eyes of the elders like him. It was a reckless mistake, a fatal one too.

The whole family had never stopped looking for the talented lady all these years.

And right when they were losing hope, this letter came, certainly the leader was agitated.

"Alright, prompt the transmission." It only took a few seconds for Shi Tiancheng to make up his mind.

Staring into the tiresome eyes of the leader, Uncle Hua left the room after giving a few nods.

The galaxy had been restless all these days. First there was a major reformation among the aristocrats, which caused people of He Yue to fear, including Shi family that began retrieving their dispersed forces. Then one important working partner of the family left without a word. Shi Tiancheng had been withstanding immense stress the last few days, it was not something describable to the outsiders.

Shi Tiancheng took a deep breath and tapped the interface.

"Hello there, Mr. Shi, we meet again." The captivating woman speaking with a familiar tone shocked him.

Qiu Man was still a negotiator after all. Shi Xin, the figure almost-in-the-oblivion of most people on Ye Chong's team, had become the most valuable chess piece in her hand. Shi family not only had returned every single property once owned by Mu/Shang in the past, but had also submitted a large amount of material goods to her. Similarly, the Jin Gui tribe had coughed out some goodies for Qiu Man. She sure had some persuasive skill, that it made Shi Tiancheng, leader of Shi family and Roland, leader of Jin Gui tribe forked out every bit of gold in their pocket.

Well, that income had resolved Ye Chong's most puzzling

financial crisis. They had been rushing their productions these few nights that Mu/Shang had consumed a great deal of resources in their inventory. Planet Yi Ju did not have its own mine, so they would need a constant supply from the market or they would have to terminate the operation.

Everything went smooth, till one report from Sang Pu, which caught Ye Chong's attention.

To avoid any distraction on every running operation, Ye Chong had seized control of all areas around Planet Yi Ju and forbade any transportation from approaching. But on today, a small team of mechs somehow had trespassed in the area. And the guarding Sangs attacked without hesitation.

It was good that they had guarded the place but...

Ye Chong looked at the remnants of these mechs...

Those mechs... were the invigilating models... of the aristocrats.

And the next report, within the proximity, 3 spaceships had been detected.

It was an unlucky day for Ye Chong.

Of all times, the aristocrats just had to be alarmed now, when he was engaged in all sorts of preparatory works...

Chapter 443: It's Coming!

The three aristocrats did take prompt actions in fact, as Ye Chong detected a few suspicious mechs wandering within his vicinity from time to time. Those were very sneaky mechs that had been only observing the Collisions moving in the area the whole time. No action was already taken thus far but Ye Chong was informed of their existence.

Facing an unknown force from the corner of the galaxy, the three aristocrats decided to tackle it with great caution under a tricky period like this.

These mechs were already a distraction to Ye Chong. The rate of spatial instability was ticking fast and Ye Chong simply did not have the time to entertain these uninvited guests.

Sang's reinforcement did not seem to be arriving soon. Once the spatial anomaly occurred, the reinforcement would be stuck at the Calamitous Asteroid Belt and failed to reach Ye Chong's site.

The entire Planet Yi Ju was on high alert, ready to battle anytime.

And that was when one last plot twist was added to their script, as a few blurry visuals were spread in the network...

There were a few threads created with the following titles:

"A Mysterious Force on Planet Yi Ju!"

"Stronger than the Stronghold, Mission: Unknown!"

"Strange Skeleton Aircraft's Higher than the Sky, said experts."

"Who are They? What do They Want?"

"Friend or Foe? Aliens on Yi Ju!"

Speculations about Ye Chong's property and his army flooded the Virtual World board. Photos were clearly taken from afar, as the clarity was horrible. But it was also such horrible clarity that

further enhanced the mystery brewing on Planet Yi Ju. The reformation in the three aristocrats was then having their attention shifted upon this mysterious planet activity.

All sorts of stories were on the board rapider than Little Rock's fingers busy tapping the keyboards trying to eliminate those posts. It only took a few moments before the news got to the station. Several talk shows were hosted regarding the controversy on some of the most popular news channels.

"Hello and welcome back to Galactic Whisperer. I'm your host and today we have a very special guest, known as the specialist ahead of the time, Mr. Uda. So, Mr. Uda, what's your view on the mysterious force that had engulfed Planet Yi Ju recently?" asked the host.

"Uhh...", replied Uda carefully, "We have yet to receive sufficient information regarding the force that had been active recently. I can't really name the possible kind of organization the force associates with..."

"There have been rumors claiming that they are the pirates, do you agree?"

"Impossible!" Uda shook firmly, "This is obviously a baseless speculation. It's clear from those pictures available on the Virtual World. We could see a well-disciplined army that carries out tasks systematically in the organization. To be honest, I personally think that this force is pretty close to the ace pilot squads of all three aristocrats in terms of standards. So they can't be pirates, especially when they have a standardized equipment, which it would be impossible for a group of mere burglars to achieve."

"Such insightful analysis, as expected from Mr. Uda! As mentioned by our commentator, the organization sure is strong, which debunks the speculation that they are merely pirates. Still, people are confused, Mr. Uda, regarding the reason why anybody would pick a place with such horrible environment like Planet Yi

Ju as a military base for training. As far as we could discern from these shots, the army not only is stationed at Planet Yi Ju itself but also had formulated a strong defense system on the planet. So, why and how, Mr. Uda?"

"Umm..." Uda did not seem really confident at this, "I do have the same question as everybody else. Planet Yi Ju has substandard productivity while its land resources are poor. Its location is rather dangerous as it was close to the Calamitous Asteroid Belt, far from the developed area with bad transportation. Every aspect is so poor that a sane person would never consider investing materials to build a base here. However, according to what we have found, apparently a group known as the Papatte pilot squad had appeared on this planet a few years ago. So I would believe that they have their own reasons to be there. Regarding why they built the defense grid, it should be related to their main goal I suppose." Such language skill of squeezing out an empty comment...

"So, Mr. Uda, do you think there might be a type of association or two between the defensive behavior of the force and the recently initiated reformation among the three Aristocats?"

"There might be," said Uda.

That was when the visual of Collision got projected to the audience. It was nearly indistinguishable with the motion blur.

"This is the visual we had obtained at the exterior of the area. This aircraft with a unique design seems to be their main equipment in executing tasks. It was pure coincidence when we got hold of the aircraft's appearance, as somehow this bizarre looking aircraft possesses an excellent anti-detection capability that our staff managed to take a shot of it only because of an accidental flick on the photon mode button. I am pretty sure Mr. Uda has some good insights on this strange bird," said the host.

"Certainly, we were also astonished by the visual when we first saw it, that we consulted countless mechanics on the aircraft. Most

of the mechanics believed that it could be a skeleton aircraft. Well, I believe most pilots and any of our friends whose job has something to do with mechs would know what a skeleton mech is. The concept of building a fully skeleton mech had been proposed years ago but none of those aristocrats managed to realize it. Never once we would expect the blurry aircraft we see right now is really a skeleton aircraft. There is actually someone who is capable of building a skeleton machine. It is simply amazing!" said Uda, with a little more excitement towards the end.

Skeleton Mech - the terminology that had once vanished in the mind of the people - had rekindled in the discussion today. The almost-impossible craft to create was found on the planet with the mysterious force, no doubt the mystery had intensified of the planet in the eyes of the people.

Few pairs of eyes were soon found somewhere afar from Ye Chong's vicinity, those were the curious people from all fields. Some of them were the intelligences of different forces, there were also mere reporters and some insane mech fanatics who would like to check out the legendary skeleton mech with their own eyes.

They sure would like to have a better look, but none of them had mustered the courage to step beyond the boundary. Even if they did, like one of the reporters who recklessly piloted a mech one meter into the territory, they would be chased upon a team of those strange-looking mechs right away.

And none of them had survived.

The floating pieces in the space were reminding people of the cruel truth, that the mysterious force's army was formidable and inhumanly efficient. The outsiders gave up their thoughts of even trying. It was the army's cruelty that warned the outsiders to back off. No explanation, no talking, one blast and the intruder would be a goner.

Somehow the outsiders could feel the horrible gazes coming from

the inside of the strange mechs.

Zoom! The outsiders' mechs backed out immediately, which some of them decided to stop only after traveling a few hundreds kilometer away from the boundary.

Ye Chong hated being the focus but he did not have any feasible solution in getting rid of that. The truth was, even Little Rock had given up on stopping the waves in the Virtual World.

Something was happening and Ye Chong's team was watching the projection carefully.

"T-30 minutes till the limit. With an inconsistency of +/- 3%," said Mu.

Mu's monotonous speech somehow calmed Ye Chong's mood.

30 minutes till the moment of truth.

Thought Ye Chong, taking a deep breath, as he turned and nodded at Sang Pu.

"Team 1 into the air now! Team 2 and Team 3, standby," ordered Sang Pu through the communicator.

Above Terry City, a thousand Collisions had launched themselves into the air. These Collisions were no longer the outdated model you saw back in Archipelago, as improvised its design by Old Jalopy while revamped its engine by Lian Yue the genius.

It was quite a view to have 1000 mechs in the air at once, but nobody could ever witness it as the citizens had been evacuated to the underground.

The reporters beyond the boundary were almost thrashing in excitement upon seeing the 50 teams of army of 1000 Collisions appearing in the neighboring space zone of Yi Ju.

Most programs had been cancelled and were replaced with the streaming of this view.

"After days of silence, the mysterious organization had finally

launched its first operation. As you can see, we are streaming the historical moment for you, stay tuned as you could see a thousand aircrafts traveling in the area. They have demonstrated great discipline and have a complete formation. Their army is enormous but not out of control. If you were here with us, you would be feeling the intensity by just looking at the skeleton aircrafts themselves... Not even the aristocrats' reforming army could beat this intensity..."

The hologram screens in the heart of different cities were projecting the same scene, which the pedestrians jerked their steps clumsily and had a view upon.

The hustles and bustles of cities had stopped, as people set their eyes upon history.

Chapter 444: Inevitable War! I

"Into the outside!" As Sang Tie was not in Team 1, the leadership went to Sang Mu who sent off that flinty stare of excitement to the upcoming battle.

The army of a thousand mechs looked grand off the air yet appeared to be a mere cluster in the boundless space. Sang Mu did not intend to disperse the army at the moment.

"Formation!" he said, as the mechs reformed into a giant cone shaped arrangement.

"This is brilliant!" exclaimed the reporter. "We have just confirmed that there are a thousand of these skeleton aircrafts in this army alone! We could see the impeccable formation of the army as they took the orbit of the boundary!" The reporter seemed shocked, "Ah? Are they accelerating? Oh my gosh, that is fast! So fast! Show me the measurement now, hmm, Mach 10, Mach 12... it's adding up, Mach 15? They had reached Mach 15. Anyone who has piloted a mech before would know how difficult it is to keep the handle under control at speed of Mach 15. The miracle is there folks! The formation remains the same flawless even at such a high velocity. We should be giving our applause now! This is a well-trained army! It just makes me start to anticipate their following move!" The news was broadcasted throughout every corner of He Yue galaxy.

To the people it felt like a show, a performance of this strange team of skeleton aircrafts traveling in the space. The people were astounded by the stern glow of Sang's army which differed itself from the typical heroes. Sang's army had demonstrated the fear of masses, in the coherent ultimate order that had imprinted the visual of the Collision army in the heart of the people.

This was day of history, when Sang family was once again mentioned in the entire He Yue galaxy.

The Collision, after Lian Yue's improvised engine system, could travel up to Mach 22 in the space, which Mach 20 was a critical point. The maximum speed an advanced mech could travel at would be Mach 15, only a super mech could maintain a velocity up to Mach 20. Mach 20 was the maximum mainly due to the issue of overcoming weight of the body and the friction that the body had caused during the travel. However, with a mech made out of not metals but purely skeletons, as well as Lian Yue's Destiny engine model, fueled by mildstones exclusive to Archipelago, Collision had smashed the cap effortlessly while maintaining the shocking velocity of Mach 22.

"Turn on all firing units. Battle Station!" ordered Sang Pu sternly.

Little Rock and Zhang Yu in their helmets started inputting commands. They were the key components of this operation, as not only they had to control the firing units according to the orders, but also they had to ensure the confidentiality of the entire transmission.

The activation program had been launched on all laser firing units in the zone.

Beeeeeeep...

The pale bluish glow began collecting on the muzzle of all firing units, like a cluster of pale blue stars kindling in the dark void.

People were fascinated by the beauty, yet a little afraid.

The laser firing units, of those Ye Chong purchased earlier and those Mu/Shang had produced with the newly established industrial area, made an astonishing sum of 500,000!

Yes, five hundred thousand firing units were installed densely in this tiny zone round Planet Yi Ju. People would be convinced that this will be an unbreakable stronghold that no fleet would have the courage to rashly reach the glowing blue stars. There were 500,000 of them, when the Coxcomb only had 180 firing units in the past.

It took Mu/Shang and Little Rock three days to arrange the optimum locations for these 500,000 units.

"Oh my He Yue galaxy, this is gorgeous! The most breathtaking view I have ever seen! A perfect, solid defense of countless laser firing devices. This must be the most complete firewall I've ever seen! I seriously had lost count, how many units are there exactly? It's shocking!" The reporter had lost his senses in words. It was not a rare sight to see a force to go full hostile in He Yue galaxy, but never once people had witnessed one force to go this far.

At first people were certainly fascinated by its beauty, but the perception of fear soon would remind them of the cruelty of war!

But Ye Chong and his army did not really care these nonsensical details. Planet Yi Ju was lively. There were all sorts of procedures to run through, inspection before departure, installation of energy cartridges, compressive explosives installation and inspection, second inspection and so on. The entire Papatte base was like the clock, ticking as countless gears turned to each other, all working towards a goal, to show something to the world.

Well, the one that got really busy as a bee was no one other than Little Rock, and Zhang Yu too!

The Mavericks decided to join the party, as they stepped into Planet Yi Ju's virtual networking system upon the broadcast. Mu/Shang had foreseen this way back so he had formed a virtual world defense team with Little Rock and Zhang Yu and they had laid all kinds of traps around the network. Those were not the misleading signs one would see on the pathway to Planet Yi Ju's database, but they were the pure explosives. It was not hard to set up such devastation for Mu/Shang and Little Rock the decent Mavericks. It was all for the transmission's confidentiality. It was fine for Little Rock to even conduct such brutal strategy on the network.

But the Maverick mob was a little overwhelming this time. It felt

like a wave submerging Planet Yi Ju's virtual world. Some of the Mavericks logged off the moment they spotted the traps, while the remaining was the Maverick-savvys and overconfident players who wanted to have an adventure online. Of course, it was not easy to discover the source code of the opponent himself even for these expert players in Maverick field, but was it not fun to face such a strong foe?

Little Rock and Zhang Yu fully focused themselves on the incoming attacks. Mu/Shang had something else in hand so he could not provide assistance from time to time. Everything coming in the virtual world would be under Little Rock and Zhang Ye's responsibility. Their defense was formidable, but these Mavericks arrived like the assassins, capable of stabbing them in the back at any second.

The two of them were highly attentive, they could not relax.

Well, the other members in Team Ye Chong were not having a fun time either. The space was destabilizing soon it seemed, as the rate of spatial instability was climbing. In 10 minutes, the rate would hit the limit.

They had no idea what would possibly occur once the limit had been reached, not even Mu/Shang could find any applicable information on this off the Virtual World. All they got was a news extract where there had been a similar occurrence about 20 years ago. But the news extract wrote the incident so briefly that there was no value of analyzing at all.

Team 2 was ready to launch.

Ye Chong and his members were staring at the projection in the meeting room. The cameras around that unstable space zone were transmitting the visuals for them.

Around 90% of population of the entire He Yue galaxy were watching them. Within the last hour, Planet Yi Ju had probably gained the attention quintupled the attention it had in its entire

time of existence before.

The group was holding their breath, as anticipating something to happen.

In 10 minutes, space would be destabilized, yet the 10 minutes lapsed like centuries, even Sang Pu the calm leader was sweating heavily on his head. Ye Chong looked indifferent however, "As expected from the teacher... calm as the water...", whispered Sang Pu.

T-1 minute.

Everyone stood up from their seats as they looked upon the projection.

What would happen? The atmosphere was nauseating. The pressure was building.

Ye Chong looked at the ticking figure on the processor, "Team 1 into Battle Station, equip all firing units, prepare to shoot on command."

The order came like a bomb and his teammates were shook awake from the dismay of anticipation. Sang Pu looked at the rolling number on the processor, his eyes enlarged.

The figure was... speeding up?

The rate was increasing quicker?

The 1 minute they were supposed to wait had been decreased visibly.

Well, the Sangs were body and soul ready for this possibly apocalypse. They had been countless before.

The Sangs maintained their formation, as began accelerating beyond Mach 15.

The space was actually destabilizing.

Ye Chong could see it.

Chapter 445: Inevitable War! II

...(Papatte Squad Base Interior)...

Everyone had their eyes glued upon the projection. They were stupefied upon the reading, including Ye Chong who no longer could hold his chilly expression.

"S-s-s-s-spatial Distortion Rate: 90%!" The voice of their observer muttered in fear.

...

"Spatial Distortion Rate: 100%"

A black spot was discovered at the center of the area right next to planet Yi Ju. Despite the voidness of the space, the black spot looked very obvious, like a burnt spot of a drawing of night sky. It was darker than black, dark-right horrifying.

Within twinkling of eyes, the black spot had grown in size at a horrendous rate! It began reaching the surrounding, as forming into a particular shape.

Disc. A circle, a perfect disc-circle.

Black disc phenomena...

Ye Chong could not help but to flinch upon the sight.

He remembered his adventure at the underground cavern primary planet. That creepy view was probably unforgettable till the day he died.

A perfect circle of darkness that hovered in the air, from which a limb of an unknown beast would reach out with an ear-bleeding scream!

The strong deja vu was hitting his head.

"Mu, wh-what would happen... assuming we attack the disc!?" Ye Chong tried being calm in his inquiry. Although he had no idea

what the disc would bring this time, provided that it was the same unidentified creature from his underground adventure before, they would be losing and they will lose.

"Negative. Outcome: Unknown. Unable to calculate," answered Mu right away. "Spatial Destabilizing Rate : >60%." That was a no-no to Ye Chong's plan.

In all spatial studies, a spatial destabilizing phenomena would be the most terrifying thing the scholars could ever imagine. Providing a destabilization occurred, the space would technically collapse and half of the entire He Yue galaxy would be affected. The worst part was, everything would be happening in matter of mere minutes.

Before they noticed, the black disc had reached the diameter of 20 meters.

It was still enlarging, like the fear in Ye Chong's heart as he watched the black disc on the projection. The last spatial distortion he saw at the underground was hardly 3 meter long in diameter. And this black disc had hit the diameter of 20 meters within the last few minutes!

The reporters started to notice the strange phenomena beyond the boundary, as they readjusted their cameras towards the bizarre circle in the center.

"Oh my, what in the He Yue is that?" asked the reporter, with a never-before-felt excitement in him, "I had never seen such fantasy! The black circle seems to be a black hole, unlike a black hole, it does not suck. Hah, at least we are safe you see. It looks so gorgeous that I wonder if it's the most perfect circle in the entire galaxy? The peculiar part is, we were unable to measure its breadth, it's simply too thin! Oh my, it's still growing, growing like puberty. The diameter now... hmmm... approximately 50 meters !"

The scene had been broadcasted across universe. People stopped their works, people placed down their phone, as with an

unintelligible expression they looked upon the projection.

"What... is that thing? Oh my He Yue galaxy..." One customer in the bar was opening his mouth wide, that the beer he was pouring went overflowed.

"It's so round and black... and looked very deep."

"I don't know, I think I had seen something similar on my wife..."

"Dude, I'm eating!"

Somehow the bartender got slapped.

"We are still unable to identify the phenomena at the moment. Was it the gate to hell? Or was it a portal to an alternate dimension? Or was it some gadget-went-wrong by a robotic cat from the future? Hehe...", said the reporter mischievously, "but I believe that the mysterious organization has an earth-shattering secret associated with its recent operation and the hole!"

Ye Chong did not seem interested in having any association with this hole. His fear intensified, as his sweat fell harder.

The black disc was still growing! The diameter? It had reached 800 meters.

Ye Chong quivered a little as he reminisced the last encounter with this spooky disc.

What would come out this time...

Time was lapsing sluggishly, it felt as if the disc was sucking the flow of time...

On the projection, the disc remained growing and Team 1 had started shifting towards the exterior.

3 hours and 5 minutes later...

The black disc had stopped, while achieving a diameter of 22.6 kilometers...

A black circular area of an approximate 23 kilometer diameter did

not seem that impressive in the voidness of space. But, if one was able to take a look near the area itself, it would be breathtaking indeed. It was a giant, perfect, abyssal circle, with an unmeasurable breadth. Nobody knew what it was, and why it was there.

But people were convinced that, they no longer had the leisure to crack jokes, not even the reporter just now. His tone had turned grim, like the atmosphere of the entire galaxy.

In the past 3 hours, countless scientists and scholars had launched a detailed discussion on the phenomena, yet nobody could provide a sound explanation.

Darkness defines death, death defines destruction.

So what would this unknown darkness bring to the galaxy?

Was it apocalypse?

The speculation popped up in the mind of the people.

The ceased growth of the black disc was a nerve-calming sight to people. Just when they thought it was only an adornment to the space, things happened!

Dark, purplish scarlet gases began rolling out of the flat circle. The gases did not spread however, only surrounding the dark disc constantly.

In no time the disc had been fully engulfed by the dimly reddish gases.

The cloud of gas was grooving, as if given life.

It was a creepy sight.

Out of sudden, a dark purplish lightning zapped by quickly.

It was a sign. Countless sparks started bellowing within the clouds.

Although the broadcast had no sound, somehow people could

imagine the cracking sound of a typical aggressive spark.

Everything happened rapidly. In 5 minutes, the cloud of gases regained its serenity.

"It is expanding," alerted Mu.

"Mhm." Ye Chong had already noticed the growth of the gases after the spark-reaction ended.

And that was when the alarm went off.

"Warning. Unidentifiable Creature Detected! Warning. Unidentifiable Creature Detected! Population: Unknown. Population: Unknown!"

Within the purplish cloud, a dense flock of red spots could be discerned.

Heavy gasps were heard in the meeting room.

Ye Chong somehow calmed down again, as he looked at the frozen Sang Pu, "Attention, Team 1. Attention, Team 1. Retreat right away. I repeat, all units retreat right away! Prompt your weapons, fire at order!" Ye Chong seized the commandship and placed the order promptly.

Sang Pu, who just recovered from the shock, had his face blushing.

That was when the reporters noticed the gliding army of the mysterious organization had evacuated themselves from the area. The stranger thing was, all laser firing units had been redirected towards the cloud of gases.

"Team 2 into the space now! Team 2 into the space now! Confirm location before entry," said Sang Pu after he got hold of himself.

Ye Chong's eyes were staring at the screen, in which the red dots were growing as well, those red dots were... they were charging towards the edges of the cloud! They seemed to be very capable at speed! Ye Chong could start discerning the silhouette of their

appearance now!

!

Sang Pu's eyes went larger than Collision, as anger filled his gaze, veins were bloating on his forehead, his lips were almost muffling up the communicator. His fingers were trembling on the grip.

"All units, radius vector 6 to 9, radius vector 12 to 15, ready to fire upon command!"

Little Rock and Zhang Yu in their helmets were rapidly tapping the interfaces on the processors, as they redirected the firing device to the according scope.

The unidentified creatures were arriving. They were charging very quickly towards them.

One had already left the cloud!

The second! Third!

A blob of sweat rolled off Sang Pu's cheek, as his respiration grew heavier.

The appearance of that unknown creature had been fully captured by the camera, everyone in the meeting room had seen it clearly.

Sang Pu's tightened fingers rubbed against the communicator, "Fire!" he shouted upon seeing the unknown creatures pouncing.

Chapter 446: Inevitable War! III

The dark, starry sky was lit up.

Numerous laser beams fired together, raining down onto the mysterious creatures. Words cannot describe this magnificent sight. The laser beams fired from the beam guns were all in a faint red color. Each beam gun fired approximately 120 shots per second.

In just a few seconds, hundreds and thousands of laser beams tore through the wide, open space!

The laser beams were tightly concentrated like the holes on a sieve, heading towards the mysterious creatures.

Laser beams were bright, but usually observable with the naked eyes. However, the holographic screen was now saturated with an intense brightness that would eye hurting!

The power of the laser beams from the beam guns shocked the people watching from inside the meeting room.

Ye Chong stared dumbfounded at the red beams on the holographic screen. This was a plan that he ,Mu and Shang came up together, but the effect was much beyond his expectations. He never put much hope in the laser beam guns.

Laser beam guns were invented quite some time ago, but they had never been the primary means of assault in the past. These weapons were practically immobile, mostly inaccurate, and consumed energy like a sponge would absorb water. Hence, they had never been widely used. Compared to laser beam guns, long range mechs could shoot far more accurately.

Of course, more importantly, be it the Five Galaxies or He Yue Galaxy, it had been a long time since an actual war had happened.

Ye Chong never imagined that their creative use of the laser beam guns would later change people's perceptions about these long abandoned toys. Despite the many flaws of these weapons,

they had an overwhelming advantage in at least one respect - they were cheap.

Everyone in the meeting stared the holographic screen that was now completely saturated in bright red.

Sang Pu was even more puzzled. If he could not see anything on the screen, then how could he direct his men?

The meeting room was in an uproar in the next instant.

Just like in the meeting room, this bright light was seen from every other corner in the He Yue Galaxy. Surprised by the sudden brightness on their screens, many people cried out in fear and quickly shut their eyes. The weak hearted ones were even more shaken.

Compared to Sang Pu and others, members of the public who were watching the live broadcast were surprised even more, since they had no warning at all.

The entire He Yue Galaxy was in turmoil.

The reporter's cry of surprise was also broadcasted to the entire He Yue Galaxy. However, the reporter managed to act professionally as befitted a man with his rich experience in the field. He immediately switched to a filtered feed of the spectacle. This filtered camera was rarely used in interviews, and reserved for more unusual occasions, like this one.

By now, the spectators had mostly recovered from the assault on their eyesight.

When they opened their eyes again, they saw something that would forever be burned in their memories!

Since a filter was used, the holographic screen was now in various shades of green. However, on this thoroughly green screen, numerous light beams drew straight lines across the sky. The entire holographic screen was filled with these bright light beams. The light beams flashed and vanished, but the number of

laser beams in the screen continued to increase.

Everyone was shocked.

The entire He Yue Galaxy, be it in bars or in the city square, as long as the holographic screens were showing the live broadcast, the people watching them were all dead silent.

The laser beam guns rapidly depleted their energy reserves, especially when they were firing so intensely. This was another reason the beam guns were not favored - they could not be used in a prolonged assault.

Five minutes! The energy cells in each laser beam gun could only sustain a total of five minutes of firing in maximum capacity.

After the five minutes, the holographic screen finally dimmed. During the firing, Ye Chong and the Sang Family Legion had not thought of using filters, a sign of their lack of experience.

The laser beams left an afterimage that lasted for three seconds.

The bright holographic screen was like a huge ball of glowing yarn, and right now it was slowly unravelling, losing brightness with every second that passed. The laser beams that once lit up the sky, providing a dazzling performance to the people, were now slowly vanishing from the universe.

Ye Chong and his group could finally see everything there clearly now.

Silence! The meeting room was dead quiet, so quiet that one could hear a pin drop.

They were all wearing colorful expressions. Everyone's mouth was wide open as they stared dumbfounded at the holographic screen. However, many of them quickly recovered and looked away, feeling sorry for the creatures. Most of them sharply inhaled, and one could hear all the sharp inhales across the room.

The holographic screen showed a terrible sight that even a

warmonger like Sang Tie with a heart of stone could barely continue watching it. The destruction caused during the five minutes before was devastating!

Outside, floating around in space were many of the creatures' dead bodies. They were pieces of flesh, torn off limbs, and organs flying around. All the creatures received multiple wounds, and most of them were just full of holes. It was hard to wholly preserved bodies. This was a problem for Ye Chong and his company, since it was difficult to reconstruct the complete image of these unknown lifeforms.

That round of assault was simply too violent! Ye Chong believed that even Mu or Shang would not be able to survive an attack like that. In fact, no mech could survive an overwhelming attack like that. Ye Chong thought that this intense firing assault was more powerful than a warship's cannons, especially against small sized enemies like mechs.

Ye Chong made a note to himself that should he find himself within range of laser beam guns, he should run away as quick as possible.

Ye Chong now knew that the devastation they wrought was being broadcasted to every corner in the He Yue Galaxy. He Yue was not a peaceful place, but the conflicts were often on a small scale. There had never been any large scale military warfare. Most of the people here still lived relatively peacefully, and had never seen anything so shocking as this! If even the Sang Tribe members were affected by this battlefield, how could the commoners even manage?

The horrible images of flesh, innards and severed limbs were everywhere. The reporter was daring enough to focus the feed on those things.

Everyone who was watching the holographic screen turned pale, their eyes widening with fear.

Blergh! Someone finally could not hold it anymore, and vomited. Like a catalyst, people began to vomit everywhere. The sound of people throwing up did not stop. Here and there, people bent over to empty their stomachs.

Here and there were sounds of vomiting, children crying, adults swearing, nonsensical mutterings ... The symphony of chaos began as fear spread amongst the people. It was as if the apocalypse was here!

Ye Chong and the Sang Tribe Legion's reputation skyrocketed overnight. However, they were mainly famous for their violence! This caused most starship fleets and mech squads to stay far, far away from Ye Chong and his Sang Tribe Legion for a long time after.

Nonetheless, Ye Chong and the Sang Tribe Legion would not have minded being known for this particular reason.

Ye Chong studied the holographic screen quickly, summarizing the results of their assault.

Ye Chong may look calm on the outside, but on the inside he was shocked. He could already identify some crustalades among the unknown lifeforms. However, there were more types of unknown lifeforms here than the last time when he and Rui Bing were at the Gateway. He had not seen many of them before.

It was a pity that their bodies were now mostly unrecognizable.

Ye Chong's eyes fell on the huge, dark fuschia colored gas cloud on the holographic screen. This cloud was so huge that it seemed to fill up the entire background of the holographic screen from every angle.

He focused on the gas cloud intensely, as though he could see through it by pure willpower.

Abruptly, he noticed something and leaned forward. His gaze turned even more penetrating, and his expression turned slightly

grim. He stared at the fuschia colored gas cloud without moving.

No one in the meeting room noticed Ye Chong's expression change. After the initial shock, they were now discussing excitedly about the brief assault earlier. Everyone was talking about the surprisingly powerful laser beam guns. That magnificent spectacle was just amazing! They had never seen a large scale war before, and never before had they thought of fighting in this way. This experience had completely altered their perception of war.

The Sang Tribe members were natural warriors. They were all physically and mentally trained for combat. While they were not as familiar with modern weaponry as even the average mech pilots were in the He Yue Galaxy, they understood battle far more deeply than the so called elites here.

This round of battle was an eye opener to them. Like Ye Chong, they had an innate sensitivity to all things combat.

Ye Chong was now speaking with Mu/Shang.

"Mu, it is growing larger?"

"Yes. It's rapidly expanding, and it's now 56 percent larger than before," Mu reported with characteristic precision.

Ye Chong felt his heart skip a beat!

Chapter 447: Inevitable War! IV

He suddenly remembered about the mollusc bristleworms and crustalades. Mollusc bristleworms were immune to energy weapons. They evolve by absorbing energy, while crustalades evolve by consuming metals. Were there any other creatures that were similar to mollusc bristleworms here? After all, in the span of just a few minutes, the laser beams that were shot towards this purplish gas cloud was packed with a lot of energy!

Ye Chong had already recognized some of the bodies as that of the crustalades, so it was a real possibility that the mollusc bristleworms were also here. Ye Chong was not particularly worried about them. He knew that the Collision mechs would be effective against them because of his experience fighting against those creatures.

Ye Chong was more worried about the existence of other kinds of creatures that were similar to the mollusc bristleworms.

Evolution was a powerful and frightening ability. Take the crustalades as an example. The more metal they consumed, the more metallic their armor plates would become. Their armor would become tougher, and their teeth stronger.

After encountering the crustalades and mollusc bristleworms, Ye Chong had never seen any other creatures that could evolve as fast as those two.

Pure energy and metal were the conditions for their evolution. However, they were also the most important resources for humans. Based on this principle alone, without regard to the aggressive behavior of the unknown lifeforms, humans and these creatures were intrinsically incompatible. This was also the decisive factor that turned both sides into enemies.

However, Ye Chong was probably the only who was thinking about this at the moment. Most of the people were still watching

the holographic screen, some of them cursing the mysterious battalion that was simply too menacing and terrifying! Look at those countless bodies floating in space, the proof of their callousness!

Nonetheless, Ye Chong was not the kind of person who would think about how he was a part of humanity. He would never willingly shoulder the burden of saving humanity. The only thing he cared about was the danger that these creatures posed to the people he cared about.

The purple gas cloud was rapidly expanding, and Ye Chong thought it looked like a huge purple heart, expanding with each pulse.

The purple gas cloud was now spanning across 700 kilometers. However, it did not turn any thinner. It was still as thick as before. 700 kilometers was the equivalent length of about 120 starships joined lengthwise. Such a massive object was still considered small compared to the scale of the universe, roughly the size of a slightly larger asteroid. However, to the Sang Tribe members who were still flying around it, it was a solid threat.

"It's unimaginable! Heavens! What's happening? Was this mysterious battalion actually here to fight against those unknown lifeforms? It's too devastating! We had no idea where these unknown lifeforms come from, but the incontrovertible fact is that these outsiders that came from far away have been completely destroyed by a powerful force! Is it possible for these unknown lifeforms to survive an attack like that? I bet nothing could! Even the most sturdy starship in the world will be destroyed by that round of attack.

"The place has become a devastating battlefield! May I remind the audience that minors should be accompanied by adults while watching this program." The reporter had by now recovered from his shakened state, and began to speak more fluently. However, one could still notice the slight tremble in his voice.

Along the Hyperbolic Flight Route, a fleet made up of approximately 50 starships were flying at constant speed. As the He Yue Galaxy's fifth largest flight route, it was extremely busy. The number of starships that traveled along Hyperbolic Flight Route had also steeply increased of late. Ever since the Three Aristocratic Families relocated their military personnel, most of the main flight routes were greatly affected. Due to the fact that the Hyperbolic Flight Route was not under the control of the Three Aristocratic Families, however, flights along this route were not just unaffected, but had increased by a few magnitudes.

Captain Craig sat quietly in the captain's cabin, resting his mind. There was nothing in particular that demanded his attention throughout the flight. The Hyperbolic Flight Route had always been quite safe. Rarely would space pirates dare to do their marauding here.

The 50 transport ships that made up the fleet were all carrying war resources. There were high performance energy cells, mechs and mech parts. High performance energy cells could store four to five times more energy than normal energy cells, and were thus much preferred. However, due to its complicated manufacturing process, they were also very expensive. Aside from the Three Aristocratic Families, only two other huge company groups could produce them, and only in limited numbers. All their products were sold by wholesale agents, and they were never sold individually. Every year, all the manufactured energy cells would be sold out to these wholesale agents.

Captain Craig served as a Captain under one of these wholesale agents. With 35 years of flight experience, he was widely respected by his peers and the wholesale agent.

Currently, he was being assigned for an important mission. The amount of goods to be transported this time was unprecedented. Of the 50 ships in the fleet, 25 of them were loaded with high performance energy cells. Craig knew that this was roughly the

volume that his employer would purchase for an entire year!

For this mission, Craig had made a whole range of preparations. All 50 ships in the fleet did not look particularly conspicuous from the outside, but they had all gone through extensive modifications. All the crew members assigned to this mission were handpicked, and they were all excellent mech pilots. All of them were combat ready, and stood a chance even against mech pilots from the Three Aristocratic Families.

Craig was confident because of these reasons. Additionally, he had been directing fleets along the Hyperbolic Route since he was 18. He knew the route like the back of his hand.

"Captain!" A crew member interrupted his rest. He opened his eyes and asked in a low voice, "What is it?"

"Please look at this, what is it?" The crew member pointed towards the holographic screen.

The screen was filled with the image of a huge and seemingly boundless purple gas cloud.

Whatever was going on along the Hyperbolic Flight Route did not gain any attention from anyone else. Right now, the center of all attention was in a secluded area where Planet Yi Ju was.

Ye Chong's expression was grim.

The first one to notice was Sang Pu. Soon, like a chain reaction, a second person noticed, then a third person ... Gradually, everyone in the meeting room noticed Ye Chong's grim expression. The lively discussion in the meeting room quieted down until it was completely silent. Everyone looked to the young man. Even the slowest of them had figured out by then that the situation was not as optimistic as they thought.

If it were anyone else, they would have thought he was worrying for nothing. However, this was their young teacher, whom they had revered as a God ... No one in the Sang Tribe would doubt him.

Ye Chong watched unblinkingly at the holographic screen, unaware of the stares he was receiving.

Everyone else looked to the holographic screen that he was watching. Shown on the screen was still a purple gas cloud. They stared at it for a long time, but did not notice anything amiss.

Just then, Ye Chong spoke, "Pu."

"Ah." Sang Pu paused at the sudden call, but quickly responded, "Sir ..."

"Did you see any bodies coming out from the purple gas cloud?" Ye Chong asked a curious question.

Sang Pu looked like he was recalling every detail of the event before. He then looked up and replied firmly, "No, Sir. I didn't see any bodies coming out."

The exchange between Ye Chong and Sang Pu attracted the attention of everyone else in the meeting room.

Ye Chong took a glance at Sang Pu, and asked, "Do you think there could be more unknown lifeforms in the purple gas cloud?"

"Inside the purple gas cloud?" Sang Pu was surprised, then the feeling turned to dread. "Could there be more of those creatures in there?"

Sang Pu's question caused the mood in the meeting room to turn serious.

Right then, Ye Chong received incoming from Mu. "Ye, be careful, the purple gas cloud's range has extended to where we placed our laser beam guns."

Mu's words sent a jolt to shock to Ye Chong. He abruptly looked up. The massive purple gas cloud on the holographic screen had indeed reached the area where they had placed their beam guns. The laser beam guns disappeared one by one into the expanding purple gas cloud, like they were swallowed by the massive thing.

Ye Chong felt dead calm right now. He quickly identified the key factors in play.

"Mu, make a comparative analysis on the rate of expansion of the purple gas cloud, for before and after our attack."

Mu's reply was swift. "The rate of expansion had increased by 7.67 times after the attack."

"As expected! It's absorbing energy!" Ye Chong muttered to himself.

The exchange between Ye Chong and Mu was unknown to Sang Pu and others. To them, it seemed that Ye Chong was only in deep thought.

"Send some men into the purple gas cloud to investigate what's inside," Ye Chong said to Sang Pu.

Sang Pu nodded in understanding. He immediately opened his comms channel. "Sang Mu, send 50 men into the purple gas cloud, investigate what's inside. Any discoveries should be transmitted live back to base. If signals are disrupted, record your findings, but you must bring the recordings back. Understood?" Ye Chong had left all the actual commanding of the Sang Tribe to Sang Pu. When it came to battles, Ye Chong had a natural instinct, but this did not imply that he would be an able commander. Hence, he had never interfered in the particulars of commanding their forces. This was a fact that he had understood early on. It was best to leave some things to the professionals.

On the holographic screen, Sang Mu nodded. "Understood."

The 50 Collision mechs made up their first combat wave.

From their first wave of Collision mechs that were flying around the edge of the purple gas cloud, 50 Collision mechs broke off from the group. They immediately formed five squads and plunged straight into the purple gas cloud.

Chapter 448: Inevitable War! V

Their worst fear happened. Once the 50 Collision mechs entered the purple gas cloud, they lost contact with base. Little Rock, who was in charge of communications, reported this anomaly the moment he noticed it. The news caused the atmosphere in the meeting room to turn dreadful.

It was now obvious that the purple gas cloud could block electromagnetic signals. This meant that mechs that entered the purple gas cloud would no longer be as combat effective. The world inside the cloud was not suited for battles using mechs.

What was within this purple gas cloud? Could there be more of the mysterious creatures?

No one had an answer to that. However, they were under no illusion that the investigative probe into the purple gas cloud was going to be easy. An enormous swarm of menacing creatures had just emerged from within the gas cloud. Who knew what else was awaiting inside?

In fact, Ye Chong and the Sang Tribe members in the meeting room back at their base were not the only ones who were interested in the investigation squad that was sent into the purple gas cloud. The frontline reporter had also noticed their movements.

"Oh! After that extraordinary scene earlier, there's now new movement from the mysterious and powerful organization. We can see here that 50 odd looking full-skeleton mechs had formed into squads of five and entered the purple gas cloud. I believe this must be scouts they were sending out. What could possibly be inside this purple gas cloud? More strong unknown lifeforms? And what about the black spherical thing we saw just now? Is it still there? Truth be told, even I am feeling an urge to enter this mysterious purple gas cloud to investigate further!" The reporter's

voice was still a little unsteady, but he was otherwise back to normal.

Everyone's attention was on the rapidly expanding purple gas cloud on the holographic screen.

Minutes passed, but no Collision mech flew out.

The people in the meeting room at the base were feeling more anxious by the moment. Everyone was worried. They knew that with each passing second, the odds of survival for the 50 Sang Tribe members would worsen by a little more.

After three minutes, the purple gas cloud expanded even more, but they still did not see any Collision mechs coming out. A sense of foreboding was heavy in the room. After all, Collision mechs could travel up to Mach 20. Even if the purple gas cloud was a few times larger than it was now, the time elapsed should have been enough for the mech pilots to make a few roundtrip flights inside the gas cloud.

It was quiet in the meeting room. No one said a single word.

Five minutes passed. By now, almost all the laser beam guns they had set up were consumed by the crazily expanding purple gas cloud, as shown on the holographic screen. From Little Rock's side, they learned that all communications with the laser beam guns were lost. Hopelessness spread in the meeting room. They feared that the worst had happened.

The second attack squad had arrived on the scene. Two battalions with a thousand Collision mechs each skirted around the edges of the purple gas cloud, one following the other. It was a marvel to see how they managed to stay in formation throughout their flight. Every turn was made in perfect sync. It was a graceful performance.

Just as the second attack squad was completing half of its circular circuit about the purple gas cloud, a Collision mech suddenly

emerged from within the gas cloud, flying erratically like a candle fire dancing in the wind. It looked like its engines would give way at any moment.

"Ahh!" There was a uniform gasp in the meeting room, and the people inside stood up almost simultaneously.

The Collision mech was bruised all over. It must have just survived a terrible fight. The four skeletal blades on the mech were all broken. Only half of the colliding spear on its frontal tip was still attached. The main body of the Collision mech was covered with damages.

"Assist the mech! Quick!" Sang Pu could no longer keep composed as he roared his orders into the comms channel!

There was no need for his orders. The second attack squad had noticed the Collision mech that came out of the purple gas cloud almost instantly. A hundred Collision mechs abruptly accelerated and left formation, tracing a hundred beautiful arches in space. Their target was the heavily damaged Collision mech.

"Comms is on! We're linked to the mech." Little Rock's announcement was like music to the ears.

"Be ... Beware ..." The mech pilot's voice came through intermittently, sounding tired and forced. The brief words were followed by a series of coughs and heavy breathing.

A sense of dread overcame the people who were listening. They were all experienced fighters. Of course they could deduce that their comrade was heavily wounded, and in a very dangerous situation!

Before they could think on what he was warning them about, something drastic happened on the holographic screen!

Suddenly, dozens of figures slipped out of the purple gas cloud. Their target was the damaged Collision mech.

To assist the heavily damaged mech, the Collision mechs that

were approaching it had all slowed down. This sudden turn of events had caught them off guard. The mechs that were at the frontlines were in immediate danger due to their deceleration. Collision mechs relied on speed. If they lacked the velocity, things would not look good for them!

The unknown lifeforms moved quickly. Just as the two sides were about to clash, the Sang Tribe demonstrated their excellent coordination in the battlefield once again!

The Collision mechs that led the assist made a very steep angled turn towards the side and backwards, leaving an empty space of 25 meters across in their wake.

Before the audience could make sense of the maneuver, the Collision mechs from behind charged forward without slowing down!

Mach 22!

The next 20 Collision mechs in the formation charged ahead like 20 bullets, flying so very close to one another to squeeze past the 25-meter opening, and straight on towards the unknown lifeforms.

In that short instant, the leading mech pilots and the second wave of attacking mech pilots never spoke through the comms. They did this completely out of battle instinct and the spirit of coordination! Moreover, the Sang Tribe members displayed their top notch mech piloting skills. Even at Mach 22, they were to execute such a tough maneuver. Even the most critical mech pilots would be impressed by them.

Both sides clashed into each other with loaded momentum!

Blood and flesh exploded everywhere! Skeletons and armor broke into pieces! It was not exactly a magnificent moment, but it was disturbingly brutal.

The 20 mechs collided head on against the 20 unknown lifeforms.

On the holographic screen, severed limbs and chunks of flesh

exploded outwards. Skeletal fragments were scattered around the battlefield.

Everyone in the meeting room felt a sharp tug in their hearts.

There was no sound, only a live feed of what had happened. A battle in space was done in complete silence.

To the average layperson, everything was over in an instant. They could barely react to the incident, and most people could not even make sense of what had occurred. However, in the meeting room at the base, Ye Chong and the Sang Tribe members, all veterans of combat, had seen everything clearly.

Shock ... Disbelief ... Dread ... These emotions colored the expressions of the people in the meeting room.

"How could this be?" Someone finally cried out.

Their emotions were to be expected. The clash had ended with all 20 Collision mechs destroyed completely. None of the mechs survived intact. Some of the mechs lost all but one of its skeletal blades, with the last one dangling precariously from its mother body. Some mechs fared even worse, showing a deep gash that cut from the tip all the way to the tail. It was a miracle that these mechs did not explode right then.

Collision mechs were a symbol of indestructibility for the Sang Tribe. Now, they had met their match! The enemy was able to cause this degree of damage with just their bodies. They must have incredibly tough bodies to achieve this.

Ye Chong was also shaken to the core. As inventor of the Collision mech, no one understood the Collision mech better than he. Archipelago's skeletal material were as strong as metal alloys. However, even such a strong material could not hold against the unknown lifeforms. Aside from the few mechs that Ye Chong did not completely understand, he believed that these creatures could fatally damage every other kind of mech in existence.

Ye Chong stared at the unknown lifeforms that came out of nowhere on the holographic screen, his expression guarded despite the growing turmoil in his heart.

These creatures were about 12 to 15 meters tall, the average height of most mechs. They had a light gray exterior that had with a metallic shimmer, suggesting tough skin. The creatures looked muscular, with lower limbs that were far thicker than their forelimbs. The feet had claws that seemed to be made of metal too.

The head was a conical shape, long and sharp. The narrow, long eyes in dark red were chilling to watch.

Behind the creature was a thick tail, its main tool of offense. Ye Chong saw that at least 15 of the 20 Collision mechs were damaged by the tails. The tail was about 15 meters long, looking thick and strong, with a black glistening surface. However, the most terrifying bit was the tip of the tail, light red in color, looking like an arrowhead but with longer blades that pointed backwards at the sides.

On its back were dozens of black colored armour plates that shined like polished alloy armor plating, an obvious means of defense. The chest, however, was smooth and bare. There was nothing there except for the muscular lines.

The Sang Tribe watched the unknown lifeforms on the holographic screen unblinkingly. They were awed by the destructive power of the creatures' tails, and found their agility in outer space hard to believe.

Unlike them, however, Ye Chong was entirely focused on the hands of these mysterious creatures!

Chapter 449: Inevitable War! VI

Ye Chong would never forget those hands! They were very similar to the one that emerged from the circular black hole in the cave underground - angry crimson lines against black colored skin, with strong webbed fingers. These pair of hands had left a very deep impression in Ye Chong. He could never forget what happened in the underground cave.

The only thing that was different this time was that the hands had only five fingers each, unlike the eight fingers he saw last time. The number of digits was different, but that was just about the only difference that mattered.

A similar black hole, and similar hands ...

Were these two events related in some way? Ye Chong stared at the unknown lifeforms on the holographic screen, pondering the question. Ever since the black circular hole appeared, the idea had been bugging him.

Aside from Ye Chong's pondering, the rest of the people in the meeting room were all captivated by the battle that was unfolding on the holographic screen.

The first round of collisions had happened in only a few seconds. However, it was enough for the Sang Tribe members to know what to do next.

The sudden attack was like a signal that marked the beginning of the next round of battle!

The 30 Collision mechs behind the 20 before them were already preparing themselves before the actual collision. They had no time to analyze the results of the first round of attack. The 30 Collision mechs charged towards the now wounded unknown lifeforms.

In that short first attack, the mech that was blocking the path to their enemies had cleared away. In other words, the 30 Collision

mechs had a clear path towards the enemies.

The 30 Collision mechs had enough distance to accelerate!

Many of the Sang Tribe members in the meeting room looked flushed. For these battle-eager people, nothing could make them more excited than what was about to happen next! Accelerated Collision mechs were deadly weapons of war!

It seemed that the wounds affected the movements of these unknown lifeforms. However, they also made an accurate assessment of their situation. The 20 creatures flew away quickly, hoping to escape back into the purple gas cloud.

However, how could they hope to run away from the 30 Collision mechs that had targeted them?

It was right then that another attack squad that was circling nearby began to approach the center of the fight. The third wave of attack had prepared themselves to be airborne to assist.

Mach 22 was almost impossible to imagine for any commoner. Of all the people who witnessed the next few moments, many of them only saw a blur.

When they finally made sense of the situation, they could only see 16 pairs of menacing red eyes slowly losing the life in them. The creatures floated helplessly in space, their wounds rapidly frozen, leaving behind pale bodies.

Of the 20 unknown lifeforms, only four made it back to the purple gas cloud. The rest of them died in battle.

The unique fighting style of Collision mechs, their strength, and their top notch speed fascinated the audience. If the first round of attack was too fast to follow, the second round of attack was clear as day. Even so, few people understood the details of what had transpired.

That's because the Collision mechs were too fast! Nonetheless, this was exactly what got people excited. Not everyone in the He

Yue Galaxy would be a mech pilot, but they would certainly know a thing or two about mechs. For most people, they were not interested in unknown lifeforms. After all, you could always find more of them in the Calamitous Asteroid Belt. There were plenty of them over there.

Mechs and velocity were concepts that were easier to relate to, and far more interesting.

The news channel seemed to understand the taste of its audience. Right now, the holographic screen was replaying the scene earlier, with a professional set of analysis results displayed on the sidelines, revealing a shocking Mach 22!

All the spectators in the He Yue Galaxy were blown away! The odd looking flying vessels became the hottest topic everywhere. Just when the numbers came out, many mech manufacturing companies faced an overwhelming number of calls from their call center, inquiring if the company could produce or at least buy those mechs for them.

However, the people in the base meeting room on planet Yi Ju did not share the good cheer.

Killing 16 out of the 20 creatures was a satisfying result. However, when taking into account that 24 Collision mechs were damaged, and 50 Collisions mechs were deployed in the battle, it was a truly worrying result. In the second round of attack, with 30 Collision mechs against 20 wounded creatures, they still suffered four casualties, and let four of the creatures escaped.

This showed how strong the unknown lifeforms were in combat - they were at least as powerful as Collision mechs!

Additionally, despite being hit with such a powerful momentum, the unknown lifeforms did not explode into pieces as did the other wild beasts the Sang Tribe had fought against before. Their bodies were mostly intact, a sign of how tough they were.

"Recording is transferred over," Little Rock reported briefly as his usual way. The Collision mech was now being escorted back to base, but the condition of the mech pilot inside was still undetermined.

Of the 50 people who went in, only one came out alive. It was a grave statistic. The Sang Tribe members had always been close to each other. Sang Ling's eyes were already red with tears. The rest of them went silent.

Ye Chong took a sweeping glance of the people around him, and said, "Let's have a look."

The Sang Tribe members lifted their heads. Their lives back in Archipelago had always been dangerous. Battling for life was an integral part of their lives. The death of comrades was not uncommon. With their sorrows momentarily suppressed, everyone looked to the holographic screen. They were also curious about the horrors in the purple gas cloud that left only one of the 50 Collision mechs alive!

As the recording began to show, they all saw an endless stretch of the purple gas cloud.

The purple gas cloud was dense, and visibility was low. Nevertheless, the mech pilot had quickly switched on the sodium lamps at the front of the mech.

As holographic scanning became mainstream, few mechs would be equipped with lighting systems like this. Strangely, the more advanced mechs and starships would often be found equipped with them. Ye Chong had installed sodium lamps for the Collision mechs to help the Sang Tribe travel across the Red Sea. The lamps were not big, and they came at a low price.

Who would have thought that the sodium lamps would actually be put to good use!

Despite the bright sodium lamps, however, visibility did not

extend beyond a kilometer. As a precaution, the mech pilot had slow down his Collision mech.

The Collision mech drifted slowly in the vast, purple gas cloud. This went on for about half a minute without incident.

Everyone in the meeting room as holding their breath, watching the recording as though it was happening to them right now.

Only Ye Chong kept his calm as he watched the recording silently.

Just then, the scene on the holographic screen changed. Something came into view in front, but the dense purple gas cloud made it hard to make out what it was.

The mech pilot noticed immediately. He dimmed the sodium lamps and slowed down his mech even further. The Collision mech cruised forward warily.

As he inched closer towards the object, the view became clearer. However, whatever it was had such a strange shape that it looked like nothing at all.

Suspense grew in the meeting room.

Getting closer now, and clearer still. The Collision mech approached the thing in front of it, and now they finally saw what it was.

Thick columns of flesh in a dark, purplish shade were growing in a frenzy, spreading outwards like tendrils. The dark purple columns were so thick that even the thinnest parts were larger than the cross section of a Collision mech. The soft bodied creature had tendril-like columns for its body, in a dark purplish colour that was even more intense than the color of the purple gas cloud. The columns looked like part liquid, part solid. As they expanded outwards in all directions, any column that got into the way of another would merge with its counterpart like liquid.

There were many dark colored spots on the skin of the soft

bodied creature. The spots seemed to be connected to the black threads that ran inside and along the columns, vaguely visible from the outside. Like a primitive forest expanding its territory, the soft bodied creature grew into a forest of fleshy columns. On these columns were many purplish black clumps. It was from these clumps that purple gas was released.

This was such a otherworldly spectacle that even the Sang Tribe members with their numerous encounters with all kinds of animals were dumbfounded. They stared in amazement at the holographic screen.

The mech pilot the Collision mech was lost in the moment for a while, before quickly snapping back to attention. He flew the mech carefully, creeping up to the rapidly expanding soft bodied creature.

The soft bodied creature was so huge that the spaces between the irregularly growing columns was enough to let the Collision mech pass.

The mech pilot hesitated for a moment, before choosing one of the larger spaces to pass through.

It was like entering a forest. The flesh columns extended here and there like vines and branches in an irregular pattern. The Collision mech had to slow down even more to avoid the unevenly thick columns.

As he flew further in, the flesh columns became thicker and thicker.

The mech pilot flew well, dodging all the obstacles as he maneuvered his Collision mech onwards without delay.

Ye Chong estimated his speed to be at about Mach 7.

After two minutes of uneventful flight, the only thing that changed was the thickening of the surrounding soft bodied columns. However, this made the spaces between the columns

wider, allowing the Collision mech smoother passage.

Suddenly, the annoying purple gas cloud disappeared, and the view cleared up.

Chapter 450: Inevitable War! VII

What they saw was a whole jungle of purple fleshy columns, criss-crossing one another. It was like entering the human body, watching the blood vessels in the human system.

On the holographic screen, the mech pilot tried to use his holographic scanner, but to no avail. In the end, he switched back to optics. However, without the purple gas cloud obscuring the view, he could see a lot clearer here.

The purple fleshy columns here were much thicker than the ones they had seen earlier. The spaces between them were also larger, allowing the mech to fly more easily across.

Huh, what's that?

On the holographic screen, they saw many large vesicles protruding from the purple flesh columns. These vesicles hung from the columns, enveloped in a layer of semi-transparent skin. Something seemed to move inside. Through the semi-transparent barrier, one could see that the black threads inside the purple columns all converged in the vesicle, ultimately connected to the creature that rested inside.

The mech pilot braced himself and ramped up the intensity of his sodium lamp. The light was offensively bright, and lit up a larger area around the mech. However, what it revealed shocked the people who were now intently watching the recording. Just as the lamp turned brighter, one could see the vesicles growing all over the purple columns. It was eerie sight.

The Collision mech carefully approached one of the vesicles. Everyone in the meeting room leaned forward unconsciously as they watched the holographic screen with undivided attention. They were all curious about the vesicles, eager to know what was inside.

The mech pilot was very skilled. He approached a very huge column, and kept his mech suspended without moving around.

The sodium lamp's bright light shone onto the nearest vesicle, illuminating its every detail.

Within the semi-transparent envelope was a crystalline fluid. Thin, black threads connected to the creature that lay curled up inside. The threads seemed to be suspended in some kind of liquid. The creature inside was the kind that they saw earlier, the strong ones.

The creature lay peacefully inside the vesicle with its eyes closed, with no traces of the violence and menace that it showed earlier.

However, this black colored creature was slowly changing. Its exposed tail was slowly turning red.

"Heavens! It's evolving!" Someone in the meeting room cried out.

At that moment, the creature inside the vesicle opened its eyes without warning. Its maroon red eyes gleamed coldly under the sodium lamp's illumination.

The mech pilot was surprised. However, before he could react, it was already too late. The holographic screen's view turned into static. It wasn't hard to figure out that the mech pilot was attacked. The attacker must be the unknown lifeform. Some of them could even make out the moment when the creature burst out of its vesicle.

"Is it evolving?" Ye Chong asked Mu.

"Calculations indicate that the probability for that is at 72 percent," Mu presented his opinion.

72 percent. That was a very high probability, coming from Mu. Ye Chong thought over the situation. He could see the vesicles popping out all over the purple columns just now. If every vesicle contained one of those creatures ... That was a line of thought that Ye Chong could not follow.

Basically, from the battle earlier, Ye Chong could discern that the unknown lifeforms were just as strong as Collision mechs when in battle.

"Mu, do you have any suggestions?" Ye Chong asked.

"It will have to be up to you. There is not enough information for me to make a reliable recommendation." Ye Chong felt helpless with Mu's reply.

Time passed, minute by minute. The meeting room was silent. The people inside had long stopped discussing, and were now looking to Ye Chong.

Indeed, as Mu said, they had too little information to work on. However, Ye Chong was weighed down by the decision he was contemplating. If the creatures were really still evolving, then it would be a good opportunity for all of them.

However, that was only a conjecture. What if they were not evolving? Even if they were, could they still fight while evolving? What if they had finished evolving?

The thought made Ye Chong shiver inside. Those numerous vesicles must number more than five thousand. If all the creatures inside them had completed their evolution, they would become a threat of apocalyptic proportions for Yi Ju. The five thousand mech pilots of the Sang Tribe would not win against these creatures.

Yes. If that's the case, why not make his gamble now?

Ye Chong was extremely opposed to making gambles in his decision making process, since it was an unreliable methodology. He was more used to arriving at a decision after careful calculations. However, the current situation had forced his hand. He knew too little about these mysterious creatures, and Ye Chong believed that he knew more about the creatures than anyone else in the meeting room. However, whatever more he knew would not

make a difference.

Ye Chong gritted his teeth and gave his order, "All combatants, prepare for war." If they do nothing now, they could only wait for the inevitable worst outcome. Ye Chong understood this much, at least.

"To think that I'll come to rely on luck," Ye Chong laughed mockingly at himself inside.

Everyone in the meeting room acknowledged the order. The battle hungry Sang Tribe was already eager to move out and fight. Everyone in the meeting room turned excited at once. Even Sang Pu looked flushed with anticipation.

"Ye, your decision is very dangerous," Mu spoke up after a long moment of silence.

"It's the only way," Ye Chong smiled bitterly and said. "Mu, do I have any other choice?" From the beginning, Ye Chong had thought that they were at most two kinds of creatures - the mollusc bristleworms and crustalades. He never expected to discover even stronger enemies. Now, even escaping would be difficult. The purple gas cloud was expanding rapidly. Besides, considering their abilities to evolve, those mysterious creatures would definitely become stronger and stronger! There were seven areas with spatial instability across the entire He Yue Galaxy. Perhaps the day will come that Ye Chong and group will no longer stand a chance against the creatures. Ye Chong had never thought about fighting for world peace, but he believed that if they do not stop the creatures now, they would soon lose their homes to the enemy.

After going through all the trials and tribulations, Ye Chong had gained experience and perspective. No longer was he the little boy who only knew to run away.

"Based on available information, calculations indicate that this is the best decision." Mu's assessment gave Ye Chong confidence. "It's too bad that the creatures seemed to be immune to energy

weapons, or I would have been able to help out." Mu's words brought a warm sensation in Ye Chong.

"Mu, don't worry. Oh, right, how's Shang doing recently? I haven't seen him in awhile."

"He is doing some self recalibrations, it will take about three weeks."

Five thousand Collision mechs gathered at a point 300 kilometers away from the purple gas cloud.

Ye Chong's order was simple - destroy! Destroy everything inside! Destroy the flesh columns, the vesicles, and anything new they find inside. Images of the purple columns and vesicles had been transmitted to every mech of the Sang Tribe.

The five thousand Collision mechs were organized into five combat units. Since Collision mechs required a larger space to battle effectively, it would not do to have too many mechs together.

The five combat units accelerated along the edge of the purple gas cloud. Every mech switched on its front sodium lamps, lighting up their way forward. Seen from afar, they look like fireflies flying in the dark starry skies in outer space, circling the purple gas cloud.

Aside from the five combat units, there was another smaller, inconspicuous unit that consisted of 100 Collision mechs. These Collision mechs surrounded a mech in the center. The tiny and beautiful humanoid mech in the center stood out amongst the Collision mechs.

Yi Ju's movements drew the attention of the frontline reporter immediately, and the interest of every viewer around the Galaxy. They had just seen the power of these strange flying vessels a moment ago. To them, the strange flying vessels were even stronger than the mechs produced by the Three Aristocratic

Families. Many envied at the chance to command two thousand mechs like these.

However, when another three thousand of them went airborne, the people watched with dropped jaws. This mysterious force was becoming more and more of an enigma for the viewers.

From the looks of it, a large scale war was about to happen.

Just when the audience was glued to the holographic screen, the news channel feed switched, the war in the outer space replaced by a reporter with a grim face.

"Dear audience! Apologies for interrupting you all. I have some unfortunate news to share with you. The news that we received earlier has just been confirmed. Regarding the accident that happened on the famous Hyperbolic Flight Route, more than 39 starships are confirmed missing. The number of missing people is unknown, but estimated to be no less than five thousand.

"Our reporters have arrived at the scene. This is direct feed from them."

The image switched again, and the people watched as a purple gas cloud materialized on the screen, similar to the one they had just seen.

"Ahh!" Many cried out in shock.

The reporter spoke grimly, "This mysterious purple gas cloud is very similar to the one we found at Planet Yi Ju. Our guess is they are exactly the same. Right now, it is expanding very quickly. For now, we have not seen any of the mysterious lifeforms that came out of the purple gas cloud like at Yi Ju ..."

Before the reporter could finish, a sharp cry from one of the reporters on the scene was heard. On the holographic screen, a large wave of the unknown lifeforms emerged from the purple gas cloud, their presence looming over like a huge cloud as they flew towards the reporter's starship.

Chapter 451: Just a M.E.S.S

...(The Gray Valley)...

Bei Guang, Arwa and Hua were sitting right at the opposite of Xiao Wan, formally. Their expressions were grim, even Hua, the usual joker of the team, had become steadier than before. The moment the lady summoned them they felt truly bewildered, as it was in the middle of the night - 4.40am to be exact.

It was Xiao Wan who shattered the silence of the witching hour, "We have just received an update from our intelligence. At 7.14pm last night, the destabilized singularity at the site of Koure Mech Squad had been detected with instances of anomaly. At 9.30pm, the squad had sent men to investigate where none of them survived. 2 hours later, the area of these purple gases had taken the entire base, during which they faced an immediate invasion. And all surrounding forces had received frequent distress signals from the squad."

And there was no more.

The three men flinched upon the statement of the lady. It had been an unwritten rule for all forces to avoid sending out distress signals to others till critical situation. Clearly there was indeed something that night, that caused that demise of a great squad.

Was everyone wiped out that night at the site?

Thought the three of them, while exchanging frightful glances with each other. They were pretty close with Koure. They recognized the hard work the squad had undergone to even get into the ranking. Koure might not be a competent squad compared to them, but obviously one unknown force which possessed the capability to eradicate Koure could eradicate them as well.

"How is the squad at the moment? Has the culprit been identified?" asked Bei Guang. They were shocked by the incident,

yet their posture remained undisturbed.

"... I do not know...", muttered Xiao Wan. "But we did not receive anymore updates from them... since 4 hours ago..."

That was an evident statement to their demise.

The three men looked more frightful than before.

Xiao Wan was not looking good either as she elaborated, "All surrounding forces had sent their aids, striving to find at least a survivor from the squad. But, to be honest, we knew nothing from there so far, nothing at all. Regarding the culprit of the invasion this time, we should be receiving an update this noon, probably..."

"Which force did that I wonder...", mumbled Hua. "What should we do now?"

Xiao Wan looked at Arwa, "How do you think, Arwa?"

Arwa gave the question a serious ponder. He might have a plain look of one from the village, but immense wisdom could be perceived in his eyes. A moment of silence passed and Arwa raised his head, "The situation is unclear at the moment. We could only prepare for the worst. I believe, by 6 o' clock tonight, we should have identified the culprit. It would not be too late when we make the necessary adjustments by then."

"What about both of you?" said Xiao Wan, her eyes on the rest.

"Well, we could only do that for now, it seems...", said Bei Guang helplessly. To be frank, what Arwa had suggested was truly the sole thing the group could conduct. They were the minority after all, unlike the great aristocrats who probably had sent off their military forces, crying for war on such situation. Moreover, any other drastic measures could force them out into the light, that would be bad.

"Very well...", nodded Xiao Wan. "We'll observe at the moment, while preparing for the worst. Keep an eye on the situation." Xiao Wan was feeling agitated of the confusing situation. Well, Gray

Valley had never been orderly in the eyes of folks, but somehow there were marks of specific unwritten rules wavering in the area, which only natives like Xiao Wan would know.

And at this point, Xiao Wan somehow felt that these hidden rules which had existed over centuries at Gray Valley would face their demolition soon...

It was just her gut feeling that had been rumbling for days.

The three men exchanged one final glance, before they left the room.

Xiao Wan seemed to have deflated, literally the moment the three men left the place. All the strength she had mustered seemingly escaped through her breath after the conversation. She completely slumped on the chair the next 5 minutes. The irritation pulsed in her soul, growing, as she got up and booted the projector in the room.

"We are now streaming the latest update of..."

That was when Xiao Wan's pupils shrunk to the extreme, as she zapped from her slumber with her back straightened.

... (At Ye family)...

The core members of Ye family stared upon the projection. There was the leader himself, the strategists named Ye Juxing and Ye Guangxing as well as the top pilot Ye Yin who stood right behind the three of them. They looked indifferent, an expression frozen solid of devastating grimness. Ye Luo was also there and apparently was at the other end of the extreme on his expression. He was fairly expressive, biting his teeth, cursing out loud and his father, the strict leader of the family, did not lecture upon his misbehavior for some reason.

It was a major battle.

Ye family had summoned an astronomical force for the operation this time.

There were warships, a whooping 300 of them. And that was only the 1/3 of the entire Ye force in He Yue galaxy, which consisted 1000 units.

Warship had always been an alarming sign for residents of all galaxies. Be it the 5 major galaxies or He Yue galaxy, the aristocrats could only craft their units behind the curtain.

Ye family was generally defenseless in this war as they lacked the ranged force necessary against the foe, most of their mechs were melee models so they needed to draw out whatever they can fire at the foes, especially after that encounter at previous war. The cannons of their warships were certainly formidable and could be considered as the design suitable on small crowd-control, crowd of those monsters for example.

The reality was not as simple as they imagined however. They were going to face unknown creatures emerging from the fearsome purple mists due to a destabilized anomaly. It was not going to be like a plain day at a pest-control company during their fight against crustalades and bristleworms.

The firepower formed by 300 warship units did not hold those ferocious monstrosities long, as Ye family was clearly outnumbered while the family was facing a much more agile, fearless mob than before.

Eventually Ye family could only bring out their army of mechs, as an attempt to regain control of the situation.

A war of fist-against-fist would always be a close-combat, that a punch could cost a wound on oneself, even for the experts like those of Ye family. The war field was then transformed into a slaughterhouse. The authority was tearing in silence as they witnessed their apprentices heading for the inevitable death, like the moth to the flame. It was an irony as they were reminded of the early 10 to 20 years they trained these new blood.

The apprentices had demonstrated great discipline as they fought

bravely against the unknown lifeforms from the alternate dimension. They attempted holding back the monsters with their guard at their best. The 8 mech squads of Ye family were slowly engulfed by the waves.

8000 mechs guarded the incoming blows of these monsters from one wave to another. The 300 warship units had never held their fire since then. But there were too many casualties, the authority of Ye family was being driven up to the wall. 3 mech squads had been completely engulfed in less than 30 minutes. The figure was ticking fast that they had lost count somehow.

The destabilization occurred right in the territory of Ye family, so there was nowhere for the family to run. They could only fight at best. In no time 2/3 of Ye family's force in He Yue galaxy had been summoned there.

That was only the beginning however...

...(At Xue Lai clan)...

They were fighting, they were fighting with all their might.

But, unlike Ye family, the Xue Lai clan was at an upper hand in the war.

A team of total 15000 units, consisted of all models in the clan, had swarmed upon the destabilized area. They were calm bracing for the war.

The firepower of Xue Lai clan had engulfed the wave of monsters instead.

It felt easy peasy as they saw the carcasses hovering in space.

...till they saw one anomaly they failed to notice at first.

Logically, if there was nothing in the purple mist, the beams should travel through the gaseous entity effortlessly. But... somehow, the beams were not passing, something seemed to be holding all the incoming beams inside the mist.

The purple mist was expanding rapidly.

That was when Xue Lai clan felt the stress. They quickly summoned about 500 units into the mist yet none of those had returned. They had been bombarded the purple mist with all their weaponry for the last 30 minutes, nothing had happened nevertheless.

And somehow, the more they fired, the quicker the mist spread...

"Hold your fire!"

They eventually had to pause and watch.

...(At Xi Feng tribe)...

The Xi Feng tribe was probably the real tragic one among the aristocrats, as their territory sat right between two spatial anomalies.

The leader of the tribe was looking pale, paler than those men behind.

There were far more casualties in the Xi Feng tribe, at least more than what the tribe had expected. They could do nothing other than seeing their compatriots exploding in the voidness of the space.

As they were being sandwiched, the mechs at frontline were literally halved to handle incoming attacks of both sides, leading to an insufficient firepower.

The monsters broke through their firewall easily and their claws had led a dramatic increase in the number of casualties.

Explosions and cries were heard from the transmission of all men. The glaring light of their mates blowing up shone upon their stumbled expression.

What... what are they...

Chapter 452: A Sneak to the Mist

"Fei Si, my lady, here are the carcasses of other creatures in the field. Hope to hear your impeccable analysis soon," said Sang Jing courteously with a bow towards Fei Si.

Fei Si first took a look at this fine-looking young man, then the pile of carcasses behind. "Alright, take them in," she nodded and muttered numbly.

Sang Qing ordered his men to move all the dead unidentified creatures that they had obtained from the frontline to Fei Si's lab. Fei Si was the expert of virology and she was provided with a well-facilitated laboratory under Mu's advice. It was not a spacious laboratory but it was certainly equipped with the most advanced models thanks to Mu/Shang.

Ye Chong would sometimes carry out a few alchemy experiments inside the lab but the lab had become Fei Si's home ever since she got the key. She had become the top virologist on Planet Yi Ju and had been spending the time on studying the content of the few microchips Ye Chong gave her back then.

The Sangs were utterly stupefied by the advanced technologies placed in the lab. They had been staying in Archipelago, away from the avant-garde decade for long, so they could not help but to show tremendous respect towards any knowledgeable figure like Fei Si.

"Place all of them here," said Fei Si, pointing at the vacuum container.

"Yes, ma'am." The Sangs then hurriedly placed all the dead creatures into the container. Well if the carcasses still qualified as "creatures" visually, that is. Most of the carcasses arrived dismembered as the result of the last laser mass fire. Sang Qing, the experienced fighter, also could not help but to draw his breath the moment he saw the pile which defined the intensity of the frontline.

"Alright, you may leave now," muttered Fei Si as she began investigating the minced flesh in the container.

Sang Qing exchanged glances with his men, "Yes my lady." And they left, with Sang Qing gently closing the door last.

The moment Fei Si heard the door closing, she lifted her head, with her eyes looking a little dazed.

She then quickly regained herself and gave a sigh, as she fiddled with the body parts.

Her brows furrowed very soon after. She knew the carcasses had been dismembered into an indistinguishable state, yet she could simply tell the variety of creatures involved in the pile. At one glance this far, she could already identify at least 11 different types of creatures.

Most of these creatures had a dark purplish skin... with another similarity - they all had metallic glow. She took out the laser dagger, sliced one piece of the skin and placed it in her hand for close inspection. Fei Si was feeling fascinated as no way she would have been convinced that it was a layer of epidermal tissue if she was not the one who sliced the piece off herself. It simply felt like a piece of metal. The texture felt like a piece of dark purplish metal film somehow...

Fei Si carefully put the piece into the processor. It took a while for her to ponder the correct setting on the analysis mechanism. Well, she had never seen the creature before, only pure instinct of experience could guide her a little.

And here came the report.

There was one particular section that caught Fei Si's complete attention. The skin actually consisted of metallic component, up to 40%! And the component was new to Fei Si, she could only name it as a type of metallic component of a particular organism.

She then extracted more pieces from the limbs of the other

animals, which appeared to be distinct from each other. The conclusion? It intrigued her a lot. All these pieces consisted of at least 40% metallic component.

These were probably the animal with tissues of the highest amount of metallic component she had ever seen. She then picked up a few strands of muscular structures for analysis. The report showed that the muscles also contained a higher amount of metallic component than most identified lifeforms in the world, the skin still had a far higher amount nevertheless.

Hmmm, these lifeforms apparently had strong reliance on metallic components.

That was Fei Si's first conclusion.

"Oh, look at the time." It was already time to eat. She was so indulged in her research that she had lost the sense of time.

Even though it was mealtime, she would remain in her lab, which as if became her dining room. One of the storage in the lab had been renovated into her own kitchen, while the ingredients would be sent by the people according to the schedule.

As she was going to have her meal, at one glance she caught an anomaly in a transparent container that caused her to have goosebumps. She held her steps, as her eyes disbelievingly fixed upon the vacuum container.

"W...what is that...?"

...(Meanwhile at the outside)...

The purple mist reached its surrounding wildly, and it grew into an uncontrollable size in no time which thousand mechs looked pea-sized upon it. Sang Pu glanced at his mates around him, the voidness of the space somehow bewitched him, reminding him of the scenery back in Archipelago and the Red Sea, the beast stampede phenomena and darkness.

Sang Pu was a little bewildered of his thoughts. Those were

distractions he supposed, as he took a deep breath and kept focused, with his voice rang profoundly, "Charge!"

5000 Collisions were in battle position, as they tumbled their ways towards the growing purple mist.

It would need no caution if it was destruction they aimed in the first place. All units had been accelerated to the maximum, with their sodium lamps at the front switched on at once, forming steam of shooting stars into the purplish entity.

"Attack!" In the meantime, Ye Chong had also prompted his combat order.

100 Collision units had built a diagonal formation with Han Jia at the center as they charged towards the purple mist.

Entry succeeded, but Ye Chong realized something. The misty region was a challenging environment to fight. All communication channels were down, the mens' rapport was solely their channel while only the light beams could converse the mens' thoughts. And Ye Chong had aced none of those.

Mollusks... there were mollusks everywhere, forming a jungle as if when Ye Chong made his venture. A jungle of mollusks veiled by purple mist.

It was a sad development when Ye Chong realized there was no more glow around him.

He had lost the 100 alliance units.

Unlike the Red Sea, this place was more complicated with the lower visibility, even Sangs were facing issues on putting all men under the supposed rapport.

Fortunately, Ye Chong did mention one simple goal of their run - destruction, utter destruction.

Whenever they encountered these mollusks, they would charge without hesitation as long as these strands did not look oversized

to them. In no time, the mollusks would squirt a kind of fluid as somehow they lost their firm texture. So the Sangs rolled on, raising the blades of Collision and sliced through everything.

It was simple to fight the thinner strands - just roll, no technique. Regarding the thicker ones, they would give a careful slide across the edge of the strand, to cause leakage through the cut on its body which would eject moisture, turning into a flaccid, withered dark purplish film. Ye Chong joined the scene much later, so he saw all these films hovering in space.

Well, Ye Chong was feeling an easier time without the theatrical formation by his men. Han Jia was enjoying a quick glide in the sea.

It was hard to tell directions in the mist. Ye Chong could only know friends or foes by the lamps. He did not employ that tactic anyway. Han Jia would just travel silently in the dark.

He was well-aware of the insignificance of one or two mechs in this operation. And he was also very much informed of his incapability of giving impromptu commands. It was a salvation for him to not lead the operation this time or he could imagine a total mess when he made commands in such a complex surrounding.

Intuitively he was still a lone wolf. Ventured into the purple mist, he had his own aim, that would be, to find the leader of these strange creatures! He reminisced the time he fought in the pathway back then. The bristleworm he struck in the end must be the leader, the queen of all bristleworms. Applying that premise, there must be also a queen somewhere here.

"Mu, have you found anything?" whispered Ye Chong as his eyes were glued upon the visual.

"This is a very peculiar group of creatures. No related resources could be identified in my databank," stated Mu calmly.

A flash then lustered in Ye Chong's visual, which shocked him to

make a drastic evasion.

It was one of the Collisions, which slid by Han Jia.

No, it was not an accident of incompetent piloting.

The pilot of the Collision had been attacked!

Ye Chong could see it, a giant scratch across the entire body of Collision, passing by the cabin. Ye Chong could also discern the splash of blood in the purple mist. The pilot was a goner.

And there must already be a conflict ahead!

Han Jia was given the command to accelerate, as it zoomed ahead.

Chapter 453: Deep into the Mist

The path started clearing up as Han Jia dived into the core of the region. As shown in the visual before, the center was unaffected by the veiling spell of the purple gases.

But that was also when Ye Chong found out the intensity of the conflict!

Although their communicative channel had been disabled, the Sangs were uninfluenced by the situation. To the Sangs, they had already fought in worse battles before.

The unexpected catch was, the number of these red-tailed creatures were far more conquering than what Ye Chong saw in the visual.

"Mu, can your detection system work here?"

"Negative, Ye. There has been a heavy electromagnetic interference here. It's a regret I could not provide you with the assistance you probably need for real." Mu's cold tone did not sound regretful at all!

Well, it was not like Ye Chong expected any visible assistance from this machine.

The blank zone in the purple mist was far more spacious than he imagined. It was so spacious that it could run a pinball platform for all Collision units.

The red-tailed creatures with pointed head were everywhere as they lunged themselves at the Collisions. It was a more astounding scene than the beast stampede before. Yes, the flood of monstrosity in the beast stampede phenomena before was clearly much larger, but Ye Chong could at least see the technologies triumphing over the wild, unlike this time... where both Collisions and the red-tailed creatures held similar strength. It always took a few intensive struggles before one would let go the other.

The casualties this time...

Ye Chong refused to imagine it, his heart grew colder as he watched.

The unknown creatures were too strong! They might be slower than Collisions, but they were way more agile in terms of making turns, which remedied their weakness of speed. Furthermore, their tails were one formidable weapon they could pull. The spike at the tip was sharp, so sharp that it could cause critical damages on Collision. The shell on top of the creature's back was fairly sturdy, that even the blades of Collision would shatter upon contact.

And they seemed invulnerable against compressive explosives too!

Ye Chong once thought he knew a lot as the teacher, but he found the occurrence incomprehensible. The casualty would only increase at this rate. Ye Chong pondered, his grave eyes stared at the field.

The Sangs soon took a different strategy. They held their explosives and withdrew themselves from thrashing with the unknown creature. They reformed their army into several all teams with about 10 units each. In battle stance they charged at high speed, not towards any of the creature, but merely towards the front.

The situation changed?

Hundreds of groups threw themselves like the dancing knives in the black zone, forming another slaughterhouse, a familiar sight to Ye Chong. Even without any communicative measures, the rapport had once again united the Sangs, no actual collision occurred between them.

The attack was dense, the team was highly organized, the action was rapid.

Collisions were strong at their greatest momentum. The creatures had been surrounded as they lost the space to make any activity. With that they also lost the ability to create agile evasions. The Sangs seemed to be winning.

Ye Chong was absolutely amazed by Sang Pu's talented charisma and the discipline of the Sangs even in the worst scenario. They always managed to create miracles with their unity.

They were born for war! They were born to fight!

Ye Chong did not stay for too long, as he proceeded with his infiltration plan.

Obviously the teacher was always that solemn, shining figure among the Sangs, even in the battlefield. The teacher's Han Jia never once left his sight of the chaotic battlefield. Ye Chong was fist and kick ready for those unknown creatures' attack, yet they always got crashed away by one giant flock of Collisions whenever the creatures tried jumping at Ye Chong. Before one of the creatures could launch its deadly sting, it had already been shredded into countless pieces after the swarm of Collisions left. It was basically a chain reaction during which the Sangs would attack, spot danger on teacher, protect the teacher, charge, flood, confirm target neutralized and head back into position.

Thanks to the highly competent Sangs, Ye Chong's hands seemed to have never touched any of those unidentifiable creatures from the other world. Not even one, it was literally zero and did not feel like increasing.

"Ye, you have seemingly become the burden of this war. Your existence has been deemed abundant as you have disrupted the flow of the entire warring system," stated Mu, who did not appear interested in saving Ye Chong's face.

Ye Chong whimpered, his jaws were quivering, "Mu, as expected from your insensibility."

"I have only stated the ultimate truth. And an ultimate truth does not require sensibility."

"Tch!" Ye Chong was displeased by the statement but somehow his heart felt warm.

How long have I not spoken to Mu like this?

Back in those days, it felt like a norm to have Mu teasing me all day and night. I thought my life would feel better without his bitter tongue around.

Well, Mu is right on this. I am a burden here.

Thought Ye Chong, as he looked at the thick mollusk on the way. He had an idea, as he piloted Han Jia, prompting a direction-change and a thrust towards the strand.

The mollusks were much thicker here, which their diameter hit few kilometers. Ye Chong flew along one mollusk, only to spot a few giant tumors on the surface, in which the unknown creatures rested peacefully. Somehow Ye Chong had a strange idea that... those creatures were in a kind of uterus...

As Ye Chong ventured into the center, the strands grew thicker, darker as well, with the dark linings increased inside them. The strands entangled each other, like the few eldest woods in the forest. Such dense environment was not favorable for Collisions, so Ye Chong could no longer spot his allies around.

At one point the giant strands had eventually conglomerated, forming a shield which isolated the inside from the outside.

Han Jia squeezed itself into the gap between the mollusks, it weaved in and out of the forest of mollusks as it ventured deeper.

Ye Chong felt he had arrived at one gigantic tree hole somehow... as darkness engulfed him. It felt like another world, where nothing from the outside could reach, not even lights, not even the sound of the void. Ye Chong was on high alert as he turned on the lights.

Han Jia advanced with the two beams of light carefully.

A few times the camera turned at the mollusks around and Ye Chong could already discern the decreased number of tumors on the strand bodies. The mollusks outside were like branches fully bore with fruits, yet the mollusks at the interior had hardly a few of these "fruits". It was strange, but Ye Chong would not let down his guard just yet, as he noticed one particular thing in the silence.

There were fewer tumors, but the creatures slumbering inside were glowing in sharp crimson tails, far brighter than the pale reddish of the tails Ye Chong had seen at the outside. From Ye Chong's experience, would that mean the redder the tail, the stronger such creature is? Ye Chong subconsciously nodded at that, as he presumed these unawakened beasts to be the greater beings in their kind.

Without hesitation, Ye Chong began destroying these potentially greater threats in the darkness.

Han Jia's wings spread into 12 spiky tentacles and launched themselves at the tumors. Unlike the alarmed beasts out there, these beasts were more fragile while being unable to sense anything in their sleep. It only took a gentle poke at the tumor, then ejection of liquid would occurred, in no time the shell and the skin of the unknown beast would turn tainted.

It only would take a few more hours... or a few more minutes pessimistically before the weakest beasts waking up into the strongest few in their kind perhaps.

That was Ye Chong's thought as he continued destroyed these unripe blobs, expressionlessly. It might be cruel but both Ye Chong and Mu probably would consider this appropriate. It was the safest countermeasure to the brewing danger after all.

"Mu, do you see any connection with the monster we encountered at the underground back then?" said Ye Chong as his hands danced upon the control panel.

...

"Probably..." It took a while for Mu to give a figure, "At a chance of 81 to 85%."

Exactly. Thought Ye Chong. Wise people do think alike, that was exactly his thought that there should be a connection between both creatures.

Han Jia went deeper.

"Wait...", whispered Ye Chong as he felt something odd.

The deeper he travelled, the lesser the tumors on the strands, while the redder the tail turned, the stronger the beast could be... if that was the case... assuming quality was taking over quantity...

He looked at the surroundings, the tumors had reached a minimal amount. As he flew about 1 kilometer deeper, he finally found another tumor. But that tumor... the color of its tail was giving him a quick heart attack.

Ye Chong immediately broke the tumor and killed the glowing crimson on its tail. No drama, a quick successful blow. It was then Ye Chong felt relieved and continued traveling.

But then the later journey only drained more colors on his face.

He zigzagged through the strands and had already lost count of the distance he travelled. But roughly... he reckoned he had travelled a distance about 10 kilometers away from that giant tumor just now.

That was the frightening part - he had never encountered a single tumor in the past 10 kilometer course.

It was indeed an anomaly which stressed him up the wall. What could be there ahead? At such circumstance it would be either the queen or the wormhole to another dimension. That would be one thing he was very much certain of, he was in fact traveling towards the core of the area.

The diameter of these mollusks had reached a length which Ye Chong could not estimate at glances, even those dark, vein-looking linings were broader than before. There were strange glowing fluid flowing inside them.

It almost felt like Ye Chong had taken a trip from one bloodstream towards the artery near a pumping heart.

The fluid inside the linings was making rhythmic movements towards a single direction, working exactly like the pulses.

Ye Chong looked upon the place where the linings could no longer be discerned far ahead. His eyes slightly shut as he inhaled deeply and made a dramatic exhalation. The calming respiration was carried out for a few cycles before he sprung his eyes open.

He pulled the lever and Han Jia zoomed towards the darkness ahead.

Chapter 454: The Opened Eyes under the Light

Fei Si, with her body lowered, was carefully rotating that piece of flesh she tore down from the unknown creature. Something had occurred at the fresh cut she made just now. There was supposed to be a dent at where she made the slash but at her second glance, the dent had been filled with a new layer of muscle, of a darker color than the other remaining tissues in the body, had been generated.

Wait, does this mean that the creature possess the ability of regeneration? Wait... never mind.

Fei Si gave it a thought at first, but she turned her own hypothesis down very soon after. It was not rare to see a biological entity having the ability of quick regeneration, but entities with such ability would never "regenerate" themselves in such a strange manner.

Then what is it?

Fei Si's heart was inflated by an immense curiosity, that hunger had been long forgotten.

She inched towards the filled lump and extracted a bit of it for analysis. The analyzing facility in her laboratory could help! It was the top-notch model after all, with a top-notch price of course, and a top-notch customer service which would require the buyer to order it 2 years in advanced. She seriously wondered how Mu/Shang just took it out for her like magic, as it was not common even in most well-established research institutes.

And this piece of fine technology was one of the reasons why Fei Si had lost herself in research. She was not assigned in a grand laboratory, but the facilities were the luxury, the finest which every piece of them had appeared in her dreams at least once or

twice.

Apparatuses were the bed of rose in heart of all researchers. They would seek the ultimate as maniacally as how pilots would seek the best mech in the world.

"Analysis: Complete." The result had been generated. The notification was sending her a bit of sentiments, as she remembered those days she would have to camp at the laboratory three days just to wait for a hologram of report.

The report was a projection of a three-dimensional curve diagram, which looked like a box of yarn balls as strands of different color intertwined each other, the machine simply had a lot to tell judging from the curves alone.

It was not hard to get a report, anyone who knew how to input data could generate a report just fine. The hard part was, to make sense of these messy-looking influx of information, it all depended on the experience as well as the capability of a researcher.

Fei Si was very experienced of this. She just took a sit as her eyes searched through the running curves through the y-axis. Her major was microbiology and she got a very good teacher to provide her the necessary foundation. She also had an intensive tuition with the chips Ye Chong obtained from the underground base. So she was pretty much the best one could find in the galaxy.

A few microchips which looked like a lengthy textbook might be identified as trash for most people, but not for a microbiologist like Fei Si. To her, the chips were God's gift. They contained all important information revolving about the working of the entire Gray Valley, illustrated with solid research data that touched the very core of microbiology, which were precious and probably required countless lives to compile.

These chips contained the blood and sweat of people, literally. The information was built in the darkness of humanity. These experiments had always been carried unaware by the mankind, as

simply they had gone against the norms of society, be it by law or morally. If it was not Ye Chong, Fei Si might never be able to learn from the dark. Judging from the folders, Fei Si believed the researchers were carrying out experiments on biological modification using virus. And because of these data, Fei Si's understanding towards biology was no longer limited to microorganism alone.

The diagram was a real complication but Fei Si would take on that challenge passionately, as she knew deep in her heart, that only advanced lifeforms would draw such colorful beauty with seemingly endless properties. She could already conclude that these organisms had undergone several evolution at one glance.

She quickly prompted the three-dimensional line diagram she created based on the piece of flesh before for comparison. She believed she would be seeing an interesting difference somewhere between both charts... Once she had located the difference, she would be able to identify the concept of how such phenomena happened.

She looked across from one curve to another attentively.

And that was when her glance landed upon one crimson curve. Her heart raced! Fei Si somehow felt difficulty in her respiration because of her excitement. "Is it the one...", she whispered as she turned her head to the other diagram for verification.

Yes, it is!

"Ah!" She could not help but to make a scream.

...(Meanwhile)...

Ye Chong was traveling along the bloodstreams. The gentle glow in the black linings was guiding his way towards the one destination he fought hard for.

Han Jia was taking caution as it glided according to the flow of the fluid, while its pilot was peering at the way ahead illuminated

by the two giant lamps.

The lights of sodium lamp were surely pretty limited in terms of visible range. And thanks to this forest of mollusks, detection system was deemed trash, not even photon mode could help visualizing the surrounding. Ye Chong could imagine himself toasted if he ever encountered raids from any entity in such environment .

But he did not have many options in hand. He could go ahead, that was the only thing he could do, simply because he no longer remember the way out.

It was another travel of a distance about 10 kilometers, which felt forever as Han Jia was traveling at speed of a tortoise for all the caution it could muster. Ye Chong could see the bloodstreams, like river, were collecting into larger linings as he moved. The rhythm started to become more visible too.

Eventually, at one point, Ye Chong was seeing a thick lining that looked like a black rubber tube, which probably had a diameter of about 5 meter.

He was right at his guts' feeling. He began getting a little panicked.

He gave his limbs a few stretches, with emphasis on his hands which would act as his sword and shield in this colosseum of scarlet woods. He got into the battle position as he somehow sensed a high intensity of danger!

The same thicker linings had further collected themselves ahead.

As Ye Chong travelled, he stopped by one pooling point where a large irregularly shaped lump could be found. The lump was more than 30 kilometers in diameter, literally looking like an aster. The lumps were covered fully in vine-like structures, on which a tumor could be found. The tumor was not particularly outstanding in terms of size but somehow Ye Chong could feel his heart thumping

vigorously.

The once-countless linings had collected themselves into the last 7 giant tubes, leading to this particular tumor. The fluid was pumped into the tumor from time to time, yet the content of the tumor did not seem to be moving at all.

Obviously... Ye Chong could be very confident that the thing inside the tumor would bring a disaster.

The bright beams of Han Jia landed upon the tumor. There was indeed an unknown creature resting inside. But the heart stopper for Ye Chong was, the tail of the creature was dim crimson. As Ye Chong shifted his glance above, one thing caught him.

6... the unknown creature had 6 toes on its foot!

Ye Chong felt his throat itching as his breath intensified, cold sweats were dripping off his chin, his back was also completely wet.

It was a galactic story, it was not strange to see a super evolved organism having an odd number of toes, but, the catch was, the feet somehow reminded Ye Chong of that giant hand which reached him from the dark disc back at the underground cave. The giant hand had 8 fingers and no way he would remember such a horrifying detail wrong.

Furthermore, the minions out there were having only 5 toes each foot. Ye Chong knew it sounded very far-fetched as clearly both the hand underground and the red-tailed creatures were two entirely different species but... this little similarity and what he was seeing at the moment were...

Assuming there was a connection between the number of jointed parts on the limbs...

"Ye, stop thinking!" Mu's voice was no longer monotonous.

One horrible assumption had appeared in Ye Chong's mind.

Ye Chong quickly got himself out of his mental schemata. The chilly back was reminding him the rumbling emotion in him just now.

Mu was right. He might not be informed of the current biological condition of these creatures, but they should be harmless as long as they were inside the strange womb, judging from what he experienced on his way there of course.

The beam of sodium lamps were converged upon the tumor. Ye Chong had no more hesitation as he directed Han Jia to propel towards the tumor.

Ye Chong could see every bit of the creature slumbering within the biological confinement. Its eyes were sealed tight, not affected by the light stimulation, like a baby it rested, and probably like a baby it would die!

As Ye Chong flew towards the tumor, Ye Chong could see the details better, as his hands were ready above the control panel. The tentacles of Han Jia had been disengaged, and had raised themselves, prepared for launching.

Now!

Ye Chong's hands disappeared above the control panel, as the afterimages rolled upon the interface. The 12 tentacles zapped towards the tumor.

blob...

blob...

Thup!

That was when the closed eyes were opened, revealing the dead red pupils rolling in peculiarity under the white light.

Chapter 455: Turnabout

It was dead silent in the laboratory, that Fei Si could hear her hectic heartbeats. Her face was pale as her enlarged eyes peered at that one specific set of red curves among the messy lines on both diagrams. That one specific attribute illustrated in red curves, while having the same levels in the beginning, had diverged at one point of the y-axis.

Fei Si's eyes traced the line of deadly scarlet. Her heart was racing.

The curve... the diverging point was leading to...

"It was an evolution...", muttered Fei Si.

If Fei Si was the very expert of the other branch of biology, maybe she was making a wild guess and she would not be able to confidently address such baseless assumption. But the process of evolution was highly common in her field of microbiology, which justified her extreme familiarity and sensitively on the specific characteristics of a typical evolution act illustrated on a line diagram. She wanted to prove herself wrong, knowing the iron rule of the world of biology, a species would always face a proportional increase in both difficulty and the time needed to complete the evolution cycle the higher the level of the said species was.

Reality was quite the contrary however, it was indeed an evolution.

Fei Si was pretty sure.

Still, if it was really an evolution, all the fundamentals she had learned in biology would be flushed to black hole. The species had produced an anomaly, which went totally against whatever she knew about evolution. "C-could it be...?" There was something else in her mind. Perhaps it was the unique attribute of such species.

"But what is the trigger? What promotes their evolution?" mumbled Fei Si as her eyes rested upon the sample.

...(Meanwhile back to—

Klink!

Under the bright beams of sodium lamps, a few sparks bloomed before Ye Chong.

Ye Chong's will sank a little upon seeing his barrage being blocked completely. All 12 propelling tentacles crashed into something, causing the sparks in the crimson woods.

It had been confirmed. This unidentified creature had a higher development than the minions outside. On top of its height about 12 meter, similar to Han Jia, its head rested as enveloped by a thick shell like a helmet of phylum, which made it different from its compatriots. The dark layers of shell were as if made out of black gold alloy with its fancy gloss. Its red tail had been raised, pointing towards Han Jia. That was the creature's efficient guard which ceased every incoming attack of Han Jia just now.

Both of them stood still.

The opened eyes were cunning-slim, emotionless whenever the crimson pupils rolled from one corner to another. The beast was hovering soundlessly, observing the gesture of its intruder.

Han Jia had already withdrawn its daggers from the sheath. Those were its royal knights, the impeccable, reliable arsenals on its team, which had never once disappointed it.

Ye Chong raised his hands and—

Dammit!

Ye Chong's pupils went wide like saucers.

The unknown creature which was under the spotlight a moment ago, had vanished.

His hands began storming upon the interface, prompting a

forward thrust on Han Jia as it charged towards the vesicle rapidly. The camera behind beeped as captured imagery of a slashing red at where Han Jia stood before. It was a close shave. The creature did make use of its speed. Ye Chong could feel the cold sweat rolling off his back.

Han Jia was actually installed with photographic cameras at most directions which their angles would form an enclosed scope of vision, allowing Ye Chong to know whatever happened in the surrounding. It was smart but not practical enough, unlike the full hologram readings today, the photon mode vision had a lot of limitations, but it was still better than being utterly blind.

He might have dodged the tail-whip, but that did not assure his safety, not just yet.

Something had flashed on one corner of the scope! Ye Chong was astonished as his hands danced again.

Han Jia had a quick slide. The slash came by and Han Jia was not managed to dodge it completely. Wham! Ye Chong lost his sense of balance as he saw the interface tumbling before him. Clearly Han Jia had been struck!

Such strength! Ye Chong was astonished. The blow just now was almost as vicious as a direct diving-kick from a combat mech model.

Ye Chong tried to respond but that was when he tumbled again. The hydraulic system did not relieve the impact either.

The creature somehow reappeared right next to Han Jia just now. Ye Chong did execute a simple dodge but the tail was the hazard that sent Han Jia off crashing the vesicle like a shooting star.

It was fortunate that Han Jia did not get hit by the tip of the creature's tail or the spike would have caused Ye Chong some real trouble.

Certainly the membrane of the vesicle could not withstand such momentum. Leakage occurred as soon as Han Jia crashed and was engulfed by the cytoplasm.

Ye Chong made a quick response by giving a firm press on the control panel the moment Han Jia was whammed. Han Jia, at the second getting enveloped by the vesicle, spread out its wings, making the drastic endeavor.

Han Jia was losing momentum as Ye Chong saw before him a dark red lining swung, which sent him chills to his spine.

Before the lining faded out, Ye Chong's hands accelerated again, to the maximum of his APM.

Han Jia lowered its wings again, forming dynamic within the vesicle. With the thrust it created in the fluid, Han Jia turned on all engines and sped upwards!

Han Jia broke the membrane successfully!

But the scarlet beast was hovering in the air, eyeing its prey breaking free.

Ye Chong was having cold sweat, wondering the last time he got driven up to the corner like this. It was nerve-wrecking as he watched the hovering beast.

The beast had agility, speed and a deadly weapon being its tail - the necessary components to build a killing machine. What made the beast more deadly was its night sight. It was unaffected by the darkness, unlike Ye Chong who moved around like a blind man within the limited vision illuminated by sodium lamp. All detection systems were useless and Ye Chong felt he was fighting a losing fight.

The surrounding was not doing him a favor at all!

He got to be calm, be cool, be icy cool, there must be a solution somewhere.

One opportunity to make that turnabout!

He respirationed deeply, as rhythmically his chest inflated and deflated like an accordion. The heat in his mind was eliminated and that was how his eyes turned crystal clear once again.

Han Jia rested on the surface of the vesicle, with the twin daggers crossed before its chest.

Ye Chong's mind ran wild. He must get something done but he had no idea what to. Oddly the beast seemed undisturbed as its front legs crossed before its head. Ye Chong would want no more thrashing from the foe, he decided to make the strike first!

Han Jia turned on its engines.

Ye Chong's only vision now would be the photon detection mode. Too bad he was not competent and talented in being a mentalist or he could have foreseen the beast's attack. But well, judging from the overwhelming velocity this beast could attain, probably only Huang Baiyi the hacking mentalist could make the necessary foresight before things happened. Still, Huang Baiyi would be a clumsy greenhorn in flicking the interface.

...

Okay, enough idle thoughts. Those are not important.

The beast is important, as well as my own life.

What?

The beast snickered as its silhouette vanished in the screen.

Ye Chong brandished the sodium lamps desperately, yet the beast acted faster than his lights.

Ye Chong's eyes scurried upon every camera projection, the beast had vanished into the darkness and no way he could perceive its movements in the dark.

Streams of sweat rolled off Ye Chong's forehead. Ye Chong seized his breath in intensity. The muscles on his face were twitching,

guiding one stream of cold sweat into his eyes.

Ugh.

Ye Chong squinted his eyes as scorched by the salty uneasiness. His squinted eyes were forced open, yet his sight remained blurry. He dared not to move a muscle on his limbs, as his hands rooted themselves onto the interface. He glared upon the projection, trying to see things.

And that was when the projection at the right caught something flashing by.

Now!

Adrenaline boiled within Ye Chong as his heart was pumped with agitation, screams of himself could be heard in his head. A deadly struggle as his APM had increased beyond limits, once again.

Ye Chong would certainly be joyful of seeing another improvement in his speed, but maybe he might not have the life to taste it some other time.

He must strike the beast!

He must take the beast out!

He must live!

Han Jia took a strange step backwards as the dagger on its right slashed upwards to one side of its rib.

Klink!

Ye Chong could hear the heavenly clinking as his eyes caught the sparks in the darkness.

He did it!

He did it!

The left dagger thrust upon the sparks.

...

Ye Chong heard something, the microphone caught the sound of the slaughterhouse. He had made the stab and it was real! The bit of blood on the dagger justified it!

The beast had been wounded!

The fact made Ye Chong excited, as he saw a shadowy figure flew towards the far in the tunnel of lights created by his sodium lamps.

The beast is running away!

Han Jia chased the beast without hesitation.

Ye Chong was pretty confident that the cut he made was a critical one, as now the beast had turned more traceable in the light. The vanishing movements could no longer be observed. The beast seemed terrified as well for it maintained a single direction in its runaway, which made tracing it much easier within the range of the sodium lamps' projection. The mollusks around had a simpler structure compared to the outside, that was also why Ye Chong managed to keep the beast in his eyes.

The beast ran.

The human chased after.

Both towards the outside of unknown.

Chapter 456: Reinforcement

Sang Pu's heart sank! One by one, the mysterious creatures tore out of the vesicles. In the next moment, the battlefield was turned against them! The Sang Tribe's advantageous position and their attack rhythm were disrupted immediately. The difference in strength between both sides was too huge!

In the span of only 10 minutes, the number of unknown lifeforms increased by the thousands! The Sang Tribe was forced to react passively. However, none of the mechs attempted to escape by themselves. On the contrary, they maintained their rigid formation and fought according to plan! The Sang Tribe's discipline and mental fortitude were once again demonstrated in practice, although this time it was witnessed by an army of unknown lifeforms.

Sang Pu tasted bitterness. He could see that if the situation continued as they were now, they would not last for long. However, there was no way he could get in touch with their young teacher now.

D*mn it!

Fei Si looked at the report in her hands, containing the latest results from her experiment. Should she send them over? She was hesitant about this. The truth was, Uncle Jalopy was the only person she was familiar with in this place. She was only a researcher, and could not be certain if the report in her hands were actually of any value.

At that moment, a knock came from the door. "Anyone here?" It was a woman's voice.

Who could visit at this hour? Fei Si was curious. She replied, "Please come in." She had never locked the door to the lab, since Ye

Chong would sometimes visit to conduct his own experiments. Besides, as long it was within the base, they should all be safe.

A beautiful woman came in.

"So it's her?" Fei Si thought to herself in surprise. She had seen this woman before. Her name was Qiu Man, and she seemed to be one of Ye Chong's comrades before her time. Qiu Man was in charge of coordination between divisions and resource allocation. However, since resources for the lab were specially ordered, she had discussed business with Qiu Man before.

Why would she be here?

"Miss Fei Si, how do you do? I'm Qiu Man." The woman's tiny, rosy lips moved. Her watery eyes gleamed with professionalism. After all these years of practice, she had now transformed from a typical Young Miss into a competent diplomat.

While this was not the first time she saw Qiu Man, Fei Si still found herself awed by the woman's beauty as she stood before her, and felt ashamed of her own looks. After all, Qiu Man was a rare beauty. Moreover, her graceful conduct made her the center of attention wherever she went.

Qiu Man was already used to the way other people looked at her. She smiled and said, "Pardon me for not making an appointment beforehand, I hope I'm not interrupting Ms Fei Si's research."

Fei Si gathered herself and shook her head in reply. "No, you're not. How can I assist you, Ms Qiu Man ..."

"I was doing some coordination and just happened to pass by. The door was open, so I ventured to drop by for a visit," Qiu Man explained with a smile. She had always been interested in the lab, and she could tell how much importance Ye Chong, Mu and Shang placed on it. Hence, since she happened to pass by, she could not help but come wondering in.

"It's alright, my experiments were just completed." By now, Fei Si

had recovered from her awe of Qiu Man's beauty, and resumed her usual coolness. "If Ms Qiu Man is interested, you're welcome to visit anytime."

Qiu Man's gaze shifted to the unknown lifeform's body in the transparent chamber, and asked with interest, "Oh, is that the creature's body delivered from the frontlines?"

"Yes." Fei Si nodded. "My experiment just now is related to it."

"Did you find anything?" Qiu Man studied the damaged flesh, her face showing no signs of fear as she asked.

"There are a few peculiar findings, but they will have to be further explored."

"Peculiar findings?" Qiu Man lifted her head, looking intrigued.

"These unknown lifeforms were all part of the same group, and share many traits. For example, when they evolve, or more precisely speaking, under the right conditions, they can evolve in a very short time! This is the fastest evolution that I have ever seen completed in any higher forms of life." When it came to matters of her professions, Fei Si spoke with confidence and ease.

"Evolution?" Qiu Man sounded troubled. "What changes would occur after this evolution?"

"Based on what I know now, it will mainly be an increase in muscular strength and toughness. Performance wise, there will be improvements in both strength and resilience. Besides, their outer protective armor would be further strengthened," Fei Si explained in detail.

Qiu Man's expression turned grim. She pondered for a moment before asking, "You said that if the conditions are right, they can complete their evolution in a very short time, yes?"

"Yes, the experiments seemed to suggest that."

"What are these conditions? Exactly how short is a very short

time?" Qiu Man asked anxiously.

Fei Si could not understand why Qiu Man looked so nervous, but she still answered with care, "Thus far, I have identified two conditions that can trigger an evolution in these creatures. The first is pure energy, and the second is metal. It's too early to tell if there are other triggers. As for the time required to evolve, this depends on the amount of pure energy or metal absorbed. What this means is, the more pure energy or metal they get, the faster they evolve. However, I have not figured out the mathematical relationship amongst these three elements."

Qiu Man no longer looked at ease. She dragged Fei Si along, running out of the lab as she said, "This is a very important finding. We need to inform the frontlines as soon as possible ..."

The situation was getting worse.

If this continued, they would be finished sooner or later. Sang Pu observed the war happening around him with reddened eyes. Every Collision mech's explosion was like a stab to his heart! He must do something soon, or else ...

He desperately tried to calm himself down.

More of the creatures continued to emerge from the flesh columns. They were now awakening on a massive scale. The ones still within the vesicles were still vulnerable, but once they awakened, it would be a true disaster for the Sang Tribe. What was happening now were just like the early signs of an impending calamity. One by one, the unknown lifeforms escaped from their vesicles. Sang Pu also noticed that they were now emerging from the vesicles at an accelerating rate. His heart sank further and further as he watched.

If this continued on, everyone would be done for! Sang Pu bit down on his lips, his eyes red with emotions as he continued to observe the war. The Sang Tribe's battalion of Collision mechs no longer held their earlier advantage. Not only that, their

adversaries were getting stronger and stronger. He could see swarms of the unknown lifeforms targeting individual Collision mechs, wilfully pursuing them. Had the Collision mechs been slower, or the Sang Tribe members less skilled in flying their mechs, they would have suffered even more casualties by now.

Pursuit ... A tight pursuit ... As he watched the unknown lifeforms pursuing the desperately escaping Collision mechs, Sang Pu's mind suddenly cleared up.

A bold idea came to him.

The reporters who were watching the purple gas cloud closely from outside were now getting jumpy. Since the large fleet of strange flying vessels entered the purple gas cloud, none of them came out. The purple gas cloud's perimeter was now clear of the flying vessels, which allowed the reporters to approach the purple gas cloud closer.

However, what happened earlier still brought a shudder to their hearts. Those unknown lifeforms were obviously hostile. What if one of them came out just as they were close to the purple gas cloud? The reporters had no confidence in fighting for their survival. Hence, despite the lack of the odd flying vessels outside, none of them dared to go closer.

A long time had passed, and still nothing happened at the purple gas cloud.

Just when the reporters were hesitating, someone cried out, "Heavens, look at that!"

Tens of thousands of strange looking flying vessels and starships appeared from the Calamitous Asteroid Belt. The massive ragtag fleet was a magnificent spectacle on the holographic screen.

However, when the impressive fleet got closer and closer, the feeling of magnificence gave way to a sense of disbelief. In terms of numbers, the ragtag fleet was definitely imposing. However, all

the flying vessels and starships came in a random assortment of colors. They looked like a cloth with many random patchings. In short, they looked like a joke. This was the same for each of the tens of thousands of flying vessels and starships.

What was this? A beggar's parade?

Viewers of the live feed on the news channel were now laughing out loud. Some were doubled over with laughter.

Abruptly, the laughing stopped.

Sang Tie travelled with urgency, bringing with him a support combat with 30 thousand men! That's 30 thousand Collision mechs! Travelling along with him were 300 starships, all filled to the brim with mildstones and spare parts for Collision mechs. That was the reason the entire fleet's arrival was slightly delayed.

They finally reached Yi Ju.

However, when Sang Tie saw the massive purple gas cloud, he was taken aback. He quickly got in touch with the base. When he found out that their young teacher and Sang Pu had gone into the purple gas cloud, his expression turned even more grim.

"All combatants, prepare yourselves!" Sang Tie gave the simplest and most straightforward order.

30 thousand Collision mechs immediately separated from the ragtag battalion, flying all over the place. It was a grand spectacle, seeing 30 thousand mechs flying in the same area. Sang Tie's order was enough to let the rest of the Sang Tribe understand what they were about to do next.

The 30 thousand Collision mechs showed no disorder as they flew to their positions. The 300 starships turned around in the opposite direction and headed for Yi Ju as fast they could to land.

Even with the Sang Tribe's brilliance in piloting, it still took five minutes for everyone to take their positions. In these five minutes, the 300 starships had already landed on Yi Ju.

Sang Tie wanted to just charge straight into the purple gas cloud, but he could not! Without Sang Pu, he was now the commander of the battalion, and that meant suppressing his own impatience. His every decision would have to be made carefully, since it would very well decide the fates of these 30 thousand members of kin and himself. Sang Tie had prepared the best they could afford. These 30 thousand members of the Sang Tribe were all the most competent in the Tribe!

Ye Chong had asked for Sang Tie to bring only 10 thousand men, but after the Village Head listened to Sang Tie's story, he immediately asked to gather 30 thousand men. No one doubted the Village Head's decision. With that, Sang Tie found himself armed with 30 thousand of the best warriors from the Tribe.

30 thousand Collision mechs took their positions outside the purple gas cloud. The smallest basic combat section consisted of 10 mechs. Every 10 of these sections formed a squad, while every 10 combat squads formed a company. A total of 30 companies presented themselves in perfect formation.

With 30 thousand mechs achieving this wonderful formation in just five minutes, what more can you ask for?

This huge and orderly battalion filled up a significant space in the vast universe, and it was a wonder to behold.

"1st to 10th Company, prepare to engage! The rest of the battalion, shift to echelon formation." Sang Tie's voice rang in the comms channel.

Every Sang Tribe member could feel their blood boiling! Borned with an inclination for battle, they had never been in a war of this scale before.

"On my mark!" Sang Tie's eyes widened and bulged. He was about to say "Charge!" but then he noticed something at the last second.

On the holographic screen, a single Collision mech suddenly

burst out of the purple gas cloud, heading towards their battalion.

Before Sang Tie could react, a huge swarm of Collision mechs came out of the purple gas cloud.

What was going on? Sang Tie was taken by surprise.

"Attention, 1st to 10th Companies, fly right through us! Full speed ahead! Attack!" From the comms came a voice that was familiar to everyone in the Sang Tribe.

It's Pu! Sang Tie recognized his voice and was overjoyed by it. While he was still far from illuminated by what was happening now, it was instinct for everyone in the Tribe to obey Sang Pu's commands.

The 10 companies at the front accelerated without delay, and shot towards their comrades that emerged from the purple gas cloud.

Since Sang Pu had ordered for them to fly full speed ahead, all 10 companies had accelerated to their maximum speed in the shortest time possible.

Both sides were flying at extremely high velocities. Collision mechs could exceed Mach 20 at their maximum speed, the power of their engines at full blast was formidable. Besides, since both sides were flying at over Mach 20, any head-on contact, no matter how minor, would most likely end in disaster.

Many viewers of the live news channel gasped, and some even closed their eyes, unable to continue watching.

Both sides did not slow down, and they were now about to reach each other! The most terrible accident in the history of spaceflight was about to happen.

Chapter 457: Crossover Tactic

The 10 thousand Collision mechs were like neatly and tightly arranged nails, flying at over Mach 20 with an astonishing power of destruction. No mech or starship could be left untouched by an attack of this kind of force.

Among all the viewers of their imminent clash, no one would believe that anything could be unscathed from a crash like this! Each of the mechs were only 25 meters apart in their formation. This was an almost negligible distance in the scale of the universe.

What was more unbelievable was the fact that the thousands of Collision mechs that emerged from the purple gas cloud were flying straight into the companies without slowing down. Had they gone mad? Both sides were flying at over Mach 20 - collisions at this speed would break even the strongest material used to build the mechs.

Were they planning to die? Was this a suicidal attack?

Just when everyone was puzzled by their strategy, the smaller swarm of Collision mechs changed formation again. They regrouped, repositioned themselves and adjusted their distances, all in just five seconds, without any signs of delay.

In those five seconds, the messy swarm of Collision mechs that came out of the purple gas cloud reformed into dozens of combat squad units. All of this achieved while travelling at over Mach 20.

The comms channel was silent. No one said a word. Only the occasional heavy breathing was heard. In these precious five seconds, Sang Pu did not give any orders. He believed that every Sang Tribe member would understand his intention. Sang Tribe members were all excellent warriors, and to be chosen as frontline soldiers meant that they were the cream of the crop. They were all raised to trust in each other.

Five seconds! This was a suspenseful five seconds, and an unforgettable moment. What extraordinary sight would appear when tens of thousands of mechs crashed into each other? Everyone looked at the holographic screen without blinking, holding their breaths. Be it in the bars, public squares or schools, or in individual homes, as long as the holographic screen was on, these five seconds were filled with deafening silence.

Even the wordy frontline reporter had kept his mouth shut as he watched in silent awe.

Just what kind of people were they?

Sang Pu's eyes were fixed on his holographic screen. Right now, he was no different than any other member of the Sang Tribe. He would have to use his own strength and skills to fight for his own fate.

After bursting out of the purple gas cloud, the holographic scanning systems on the Collision mechs had begun to function again.

The huge presence of the 1st to 10th Companies registered clearly on the holographic screen. This was not his first time doing this, but he could already feel the electric jolt of excitement shot through his veins. He could even hear his own breathing grow shorter!

Getting close now ... Closer still ... The huge wave of Collisions mechs rushed towards him on the holographic screen. In that moment, Sang Pu felt like a withered leaf, riding the massive waves of a tsunami - he could die at any moment! Sang Pu did not know who was piloting the mech that would go right past him, but that did not matter. The point was, if he really crashed into that mech, both their mechs would disintegrate into pieces, and his own body would explode into a thousand pieces, just like his mech! The mech showed no signs of avoiding him as it flew straight

ahead towards him. The mech occupied almost two thirds of his holographic screen - they were very close to each other now! He could even see the patterns on the Collision mech, unique to their skeleton material.

Roar! His blood sang with exhilaration. Sang Pu felt a rush of excitement like never before.

Now!

His dilated pupils shone with battlelust, and his hands moved the mech's control lever.

To the side, then push forward. His hands moved the lever steadily without delay, just a smooth gesture on the controls.

Sang Pu's Collision mech wriggled to the side, smooth as a fish, and flew right past the other mech that was coming towards him! There was no time to think. At over Mach 20, Sang Pu flew his mech through the 25 meter gap between the mechs in front of him, and continued his trajectory.

There were no signs of collision! Sang Pu did not need to check to know that he was safe. His tension finally released, and he felt the fatigue of the war overwhelming him.

Every Sang Tribe member knew about Collision mechs like the back of their hands. Unlike He Yue Galaxy's mech pilots, the Collision mechs were their only choice of weapons, for they had no other options. They could only think hard about new ways to fight with the Collision mechs. They did not think about upgrading their mechs, or changing the weapons installed, or buy newer models, since Collision mechs were practically their companions, their trusted weapon in the face of battle. That was why every Sang Tribe member who had their own Collision mech would take very good care of them, and knew every tiny detail of their mechs!

That was why Sang Pu did not need to check to know that his mech did not come into contact with the other mechs.

However, now was not the time to rest. Sang Pu shook himself awake, suppressing his joy of having survived the stunt, and forced himself to calm down as soon as possible. He understood his duties as commander of the entire Sang Tribe. He was not just an average soldier. Soldiers could perform outstanding feats through their excitement. A commander, however, would benefit more from staying calm. Only calmness can help him make the right decision.

Sang Pu was not aware that his mech's skeleton wings and that of the mech that flew past him were separated by less than 10 centimeters back then. At a speed of over Mach 20, any minor contact would have its implications amplified. If he had steered five centimeters more to the side, his ending would have been different.

Sang Pu quickly calmed down, and began to assess his surroundings. The mechs that came out of the purple gas cloud with him had all survived the flight. Sang Pu had not anticipated Sang Tie's arrival, and had only planned to lure the unknown lifeforms out of the purple gas cloud. This would considerably strengthen their position. With the comms system online, they would be able to coordinate attacks more effectively. The lack of numbers can be overcome with better strategizing. Besides, outside the purple gas cloud, their holographic scanning systems would allow them to see better, and get a better sense of the overall situation.

He was surprised to find Sang Tie and the readily assembled battalion. An idea came to him, and Sang Pu was reminded of a combat technique that they had often practiced in the Sang Family Village - crossover flying. This was something they came up with themselves. It consisted of two mech squads flying through each other, through the gaps between the mechs in each squad. This was a very dangerous strategy, and would require highly skilled mech pilots. After all, if both sides were flying at high speed, the mech pilot would have little time to react when flying through the

gaps. Failing this would cause them to suffer casualties from both squads due to the impact. This strategy was designed to use against enemies in tight pursuit, and Sang Pu thought this was just the right scenario for it.

However, Sang Pu also knew that, despite their familiarity with this technique, they had never done it on such a large scale, with tens of thousands of mechs involved. Besides, they had not used this technique in practice before, and practices never involved flying at such a high speed. He could not be certain that every Collision mech would survive this. Nevertheless, it seemed that they did far better than he expected. Only a few mechs had collided with each other.

Sang Pu knew that it was time to turn the tide of the war.

Chapter 458: In Tight Pursuit

Fwoosh! Fwoosh! Fwoosh!

Sang Tie's Collision mech burst through several unknown lifeforms like an arrow through bullseyes. However it was more like ripping through the bullseyes, in a more precise sense. The strong bodies of the unknown lifeforms exploded into countless pieces from the strong impact.

The Collision mech's frontal defense was also its strongest, that was why attacking with their collision spears in fronts was their preferred method of attack, and the safest one.

They rained down like heavy downpour!

Beside Sang Pu, numerous Collision mechs flew past him towards the unknown lifeforms. The mechs hit fast and hard. Every collision ended with a shower of blood, accompanied by separated body parts.

One of the creatures tried to turn back and escape, but it never stood a chance! A brief sensation of pain came from its waist, with a shocking amount of power that was passed into the creature, and it spun away uncontrollably. Just then, it noticed a familiar looking lower body flying away from itself. A moment later, an excruciating pain shot up from below, and it almost blacked out. As it looked down its body, it found an empty space below its waist, where blood was gushing out violently.

Its eyes bulged out as it stared at its missing lower body in disbelief. Its face convulsed from the pain, and before it could react any further, it felt another sharp pain, and then it lost consciousness.

A Collision mech's skeleton fins had easily sliced its brain in half. It happened so fast that the convulsed expression on the face remained on its face, where the slightly bulging eyes were filled

with horror and disbelief.

Without air in outer space, sound could not travel. However, the continuous wave of collisions carried on where the mechs where. Every time a mech crashed into flesh, it sent a jolt of shock into the hearts of the spectators. Here, the power of strength and speed, of brute force and primitiveness, and the story of life and death was told in its entirety.

The enemies were everywhere. Sang Tie and others did not even need to aim for their targets. In fact, given the chaotic situation, aiming for targets was a foolish idea.

Sang Tie understood that. Their mechs were closely arranged together like a comb, and the teeth of this comb were sharp. What would it feel like to be combed through with a tool like this? Sang Tie and his men demonstrated it all, leaving trails of flesh and blood!

The attack happened so fast that all the viewers could barely breathe under the suspense. It was too violent! Compared to an exchange of laser attacks in outer space, this war was even more vicious and shocking. People breathed heavily as they watched. The holographic screen remained silent, but the explosive and continuous assault via collisions could almost tear the screen apart.

Compared to what was showing now on the holographic screen, the so-called grandly staged movies were like child's play. People watched in fear at the battle unfolding on the holographic screen.

He Yue Galaxy was a competitive place, where forces stood against one another, but for the average person, life was usually peaceful and safe.

However, the world had changed! They suddenly realized that death and war had arrived so close to them. Fear began to spread among the commoners. Adults covered the children's eyes. They did not want the children to witness such a bloody and dreadful

scene.

Sang Tie's expression was steel cold. They were doing well so far, killing so many of the unknown lifeforms that he lost count of. The battle was like a war in hell for the people in the He Yue Galaxy, but for the seasoned warriors like Sang Tie and his tribe, it was only battle as usual. After their battle during the Beast Stampede, large scale battles were no longer unfamiliar to them. In this respect, the Three Aristocratic Families were lacking compared to them.

Sang Tie may look like a rough man, but he was in reality a man of detail. He even had some talent in warfare. Soon, he noticed subtle changes in the battlefield. Since the Collision mechs kept running into the unknown lifeforms, they had begun to slow down. Without enough speed, Collision mechs were less effective in attacks, and every member of the Sang Tribe knew this.

Just then, a slightly weary voice from Sang Pu came through the comms, "Companies of the first attack wave, leave the battlefield immediately, take care to stay in formation."

"As expected of Sang Pu, to understand the situation at the frontlines even without being there, and grasping the timing well," Sang Tie thought to himself, praising the other man. Without further delay, the surviving mechs of the 1st to 10th Companies spread out and left the battlefield.

The sudden departure of attackers was a great relief to the creatures, but before they could head back to the purple gas cloud, they realized in horror that another wave of attack was upon them!

This time, the creatures received a devastating blow.

Red-tailed beast - Ye Chong named the creatures as such. Of course, Mu had no objections. After all, red-tailed beast was better than being called Number One Lifeform or something. All the signs seemed to suggest that this particular red-tailed beast was the leader of the herd. Ye Chong decided to finish it off.

Ye Chong knew that the wound he inflicted on the creature earlier was in part due to luck. Ye Chong was not used to relying on abstract ideas like luck. Would his lucky streak continue? The thought never occurred to him at all.

The best strategy now would be to pursue their enemy and thoroughly defeat them, solving the problem once and for all.

Ye Chong gave his all, pursuing the red-tailed beast.

It looked like he was quite lucky after all, to have kept up with the beast so far. Given the chaotic environment, even Mu's scanning system would be useless, much less Han Jia's holographic scanning system. He could only rely on the sodium lamp and stay on the enemy's tail. It was not easy.

The red-tailed beast was heading outwards quickly.

Ye Chong was grateful for his earlier decision of destroying all the vesicles in his path. If any red-tailed beast suddenly appeared here right now, even the most average red-tailed beast would put him at a great disadvantage.

The one escaping would not be this particular red-tailed beast, but himself.

Ye Chong kept his eyes wide open, wary of making mistakes. In this complicated environment, he could lose his target at any moment. Once he lost his prey, it would be impossible to find it again.

There would be a huge, thick flesh column at the next turn, Ye Chong remembered clearly. He had entered the center region of the purple gas cloud from there.

He grew anxious immediately. Just now, Sang Pu and the rest were still fighting against the red-tailed beasts out here. The fight must be going on viciously. If he wanted to surround and attack his strong and destructive target out there, they would certainly pay a high price for it. Besides, it was more spacious out there, with

more gaps around them for the beast to go through and escape.

It seemed as though Ye Chong's pursuit was about to end in failure, as the red-tailed beast went halfway through the flesh column. However, to Ye Chong's surprise, the creature suddenly turned tail, as if in fright, and headed off in another direction.

Ye Chong was surprised for a moment, but quickly reacted and continued his pursuit. The red-tailed beast momentary pause allowed Ye Chong to close the distance between them.

What happened out there? Ye Chong was baffled. However, he pushed the question aside quickly and concentrated on chasing the wounded red-tailed beast.

The red-tailed beast was very familiar with the area. Had it not been wounded, Ye Chong would not have been able to keep up for so long. Even so, Ye Chong still had to give all he had to keep up.

This posed a challenge to his mech maneuvering skills. There were turns everywhere. An average mech pilot would have turned dizzy in the pursuit. Even though short ranged turns were one of Ye Chong's better moves, he was also affected by the rough flight. Nevertheless, he suppressed whatever discomfort he felt and continued on. He knew that this was his best chance to finish off the red-tailed beast. If he missed this chance, the next time would not be so easy.

Ye Chong followed the red-tailed beast as best as he could.

Just then, after avoiding another flesh column, Ye Chong felt the space in front of him open up, but his heart sank. He and the red-tailed beast had entered the empty space where all the normal red-tailed beasts were.

However, what Ye Chong found was enough to leave even someone as rigid as him flabbergasted!

Floating all round him were dead bodies of the red-tailed beasts. These cold, gray bodies floated around peacefully in the space

around him, too many to count. The flesh columns nearby were also turned into a mess, thoroughly destroyed, leaving no more fluid in their flesh. Their dark gray surfaces looked dim and lifeless. All the vesicles on the flesh columns were also destroyed.

The red-tailed beast that just entered the area froze in place for a moment, then looked back at Ye Chong.

Its crimson red eyes were now shining in the color of blood, with its face twisted menacingly.

Ye Chong felt all his hair rise. He quickly readied himself for battle. A beast at bay will put up a desperate fight. That was the nature of things. Ye Chong had no wish to die here.

However, much to his astonishment, the red-tailed beast turned and ran, moving even faster than before.

After a short pause, Han Jia accelerated and continued its pursuit.

Chapter 459: Out of the Purple Gas Cloud

The cold bodies of the red-tailed beasts were everywhere. This was a hindrance to Ye Chong's pursuit. The wounded red-tailed beast moved deftly, easily moving between the bodies. Had it not been wounded, Ye Chong would have lost it long ago. It was a pity that Sang Pu and the rest were not here, or the beast would never stand a chance at escaping.

Ye Chong did not know that Sang Pu and the rest were destroying the flesh columns around them somewhere not far away. However, due to the flesh columns between them and the lack of comms, they had passed by each other without noticing.

The red-tailed beast was injured, but Ye Chong would not have been able to tell had he not seen how fast it could actually move beforehand. Knowing its true abilities, Ye Chong could see that it was actually moving quite a bit slower right now.

Han Jia continued its pursuit, avoiding the obstacles along the way. Ultimately, however, Han Jia was just a machine, and not as agile as the red-tailed beast. It was only because of Ye Chong's superior flying skills that he managed to keep up.

An environment like this, with obstacles floating around everywhere was the least preferred for mech pilots, and the most dangerous. It would be difficult for long range mechs to aim, and equally difficult for close range mechs to fight in this environment, since they could not accelerate as much as they would like, fighting with their full potential, without putting their lives at risk.

Of course, there were exceptions. Sniper mech pilots, for example, would love complicated places like these. Besides, they were good at concealing themselves, and long distance single-shot kills made them the most fearsome killers that concealed themselves in the dark.

Ye Chong considered Mu to be an excellent sniper mech pilot.

However, the place he was in now was too strange, such that even Mu's scanning system would not work. Ye Chong could only rely on his own to keep his target in sight.

The red-tailed beast seemed to realize that the place was no longer its territory. It flew towards the edge of the purple gas cloud, intending to leave.

This was good news for Ye Chong. He knew that once they were out of the gas cloud, the odds would be in his favor.

As he flew by rows and rows of flesh columns, Ye Chong soon noticed that they looked thinner and thinner.

They were now near the edge of the purple gas cloud. Ye Chong estimated around half a minute before they were completely outside the purple gas cloud.

As the red-tailed beast in front of him continued its swift escape, Ye Chong concentrated on his pursuit. Here in the purple gas cloud, if they got separated any further, he would not be able to see his target.

Whoosh! A red-tailed beast burst out of the whirling purple gas cloud like a bolt of lightning. In the next instant, a mech swooshed out in pursuit of the creature.

They were finally outside!

In that instant, Han Jia's photon processor began to function normally again. The red-tailed beast's image became clearer, and this was a relief to Ye Chong.

Just then, Mu spoke up, "Ye, I just received a message from the base."

"What message?" Ye Chong's eyes were on the holographic screen as he asked.

"It's about a report by Fei Si on these creatures," Mu explained calmly.

"Report?" Ye Chong paused slightly. Why would they send over a report at this hour? However, he quickly focused. "What's it say?"

"Fei Si's research showed that these creatures can undergo evolution very quickly. There are two main catalysts for their evolution - pure energy and metals." Mu's voice was characteristically mechanical.

"Pure energy and metals?" Ye Chong frowned, but his eyes never left the holographic screen. With the photon processor and Mu's aid, he would easily keep up with his target, allowing him some room to think about this problem.

"Could it be that energy weapons are ineffective against them?" Ye Chong reached the crux of the issue quickly. He thought of the mollusc bristleworms, which could absorb energy beams.

Ye Chong looked at the back silhouette of the red-tailed beast and frowned again. The mollusc bristleworms were immune to energy weapons, but they moved slowly and were not particularly aggressive. However, the red-tailed beasts were entirely different animals. They were fast and agile, with astonishing power in them. The bright red tips of their tails were a dangerous threat. If these creatures were immune to energy weapons, it would be a huge problem!

"That would have to be confirmed by experiment. Should we begin now?" Mu asked methodically.

Ye Chong felt helpless as he stole a glance at the starship some distance away from him, and rejected the idea. "There's too many people now." He understood Mu's idea of an experiment. If Mu or Shang suddenly appeared before their massive audience, it would be shocking news to the world. Ye Chong had begun to have an inkling of where Mu and Shang came from. He must be closely related to the Xue Lai Clan in some way, even though he was not sure of the details.

However, both Ye Chong, Mu and Shang did not mind the topic

so much. After experiencing so much together, Ye Chong did not hold too much issues like his own origin, or Mu's and Shang's. Right now, he only wanted to return to the Five Galaxies and spend time on his interests, like research. Even if he could not return, living a peaceful life in the He Yue Galaxy would be fine. As for Mu and Shang, the mech would of course be uninterested in the story of their own origin.

It was truly regretful for him that such a simple wish could not be so easily granted. With the sudden appearance of these unknown lifeforms, war had officially begun. War between men would have room for mercy, but it would be not be the case for war between different species. The end result would usually be the elimination of one of the two species involved.

Fei Si's report had proved that much. Pure energy and metals were the catalysts for the evolution of these creatures. These two elements were also essential for human survival. With that, the incompatibility between humans and these creatures was obvious.

This war would not end without the annihilation of one of the two species.

The He Yue Galaxy would not be peaceful for long time ahead. For some reason, Ye Chong could no help but sighed at the thought. What were the Five Galaxies like at this moment? Would he be able to have peace there?

Ye Chong was not particularly ambitious. He did not feel like some protagonist in this war. The main players on the human side were probably the Three Aristocratic Families. Perhaps, when the Sang Tribe won this battle, they would also rise to become one of the main players too.

In fact, Ye Chong was also not particularly dedicated to the Sang Tribe. The way he saw it, he was helped by the Sang Tribe, and had in turn assisted them himself. Based on the principle of equal exchange that Mu told him about, they did not owe each other

anything.

The only reason he returned this time was to ensure that the Sang Tribe was not entirely destroyed due to their ignorance. Now that they were winning, he had no business here anymore. After killing this red-tailed beast, Ye Chong planned to bring Rui Bing and Little Rock with him and find their way back to the Five Galaxies.

The war in the He Yue Galaxy would only worsen in the future. Ye Chong did not mind the fight, but he would not fight for meaningless ideals. Fighting for himself - that was his motto.

Perhaps, returning to the Five Galaxies would not be such a bad idea.

"Mu, where are Sang Pu and the rest?" Ye Chong broke off his train of thought, took a look at the red-tailed beast on the holographic screen, and asked Mu.

"Still in the purple gas cloud. Sang Tie had brought 30 thousand men with him, and they are now all in the battlefield." From the moment he left the purple gas cloud, Mu and Shang had kept in touch with the base.

Ye Chong acknowledged the mech. He was not worried about Sang Pu and the others. He could not offer help in terms of directing the battalion, Sang Pu was more than equipped for that. Besides, with Sang Tie's 30 thousand strong reinforcement, they should be able to handle themselves.

Mu reminded Ye Chong, "This red-tailed beast is heading for the Calamitous Asteroid Belt."

"Right," Ye Chong replied softly. Han Jia continued its pursuit. If Mu or Shang made their appearance now, they could give long distance shooting a try, but Ye Chong did not want that. Mu's and Shang's origin story must be extraordinary. He might not mind it, but other people would. The Xue Lai Clan, for example, would

surely do something if they knew about Mu and Shang. If history was any indication, they would probably opt for some dangerous and hostile approach.

On the other hand, long distance shooting was Ye Chong's Achilles heel. He had no choice but to continue chasing the beast.

Once they entered the calamitous asteroid belt, beyond the eyes of outsiders, Mu would be free to do his thing. More importantly, the red-tailed beast was ultimately only an animal, and had limited stamina. Han Jia, however, was powered by teardrop mineralite, and could fly longer than anything else.

Ye Chong could not help but felt impressed by the red-tailed beast's strength. Despite its injury, Han Jia still needed to keep all its engines at maximum power to keep up with the creature.

The chase was noticed by the reporters who were following the war closely.

"Look at that," one of the reporters cried out in excitement, "Just now, an unknown lifeform and a mech had burst out of the purple gas cloud. Here, we can see the creature clearly."

The image of the red-tailed beast appeared more clearly on the holographic screen.

"Wah!" The reporter could not help but gasped. "This is the clearest view we have of the unknown lifeform so far. Dear viewers, you can see that this unknown lifeform is different from the ones we had seen before, it's back ..."

The reporter suddenly changed topic. "Let's talk about the creature later. Now let's look at the mech behind it."

"Huh?" The reporter gasped again in surprise. "Here is a regretful news for all our dear viewers. The mech's anti-scanning system is excellent. Our holographic scanning system cannot capture it. What you're seeing now is a feed from our optical system. It's not too clear, and we can hardly see the how the mech looks like ..."

As the reporter made his commentary, the red-tailed beast and Han Jia vanished into the Calamitous Asteroid Belt, one after the other.

Chapter 460: New Insights

Ye Chong did not expect the chase to last for 24 days.

Had it not been for Mu, Han Jia's holographic scanning system would not have been enough for him to keep up with the red-tailed beast. On the ninth day, he began to consider end the pursuit and return to base. Inside the Calamitous Asteroid Belt, numerous rocks and planetary bodies of sizes were everywhere. It was easy to lose one's way, and even Mu could not guarantee identifying their location.

However, Ye Chong decided to continue his pursuit for a very specific reason.

Once they entered the Calamitous Asteroid Belt, Ye Chong deployed Mu immediately. With that, they quickly verified that the red-tailed beast was immune to pure energy attacks. Perhaps it was not immune to all kinds of energy based weapons, but Mu's Recursion rifle was at least ineffective against it.

Of course, that was only one of the reasons Ye Chong continued the pursuit. What made him continue on was an incident that happened on the ninth day, which was the day that he began to consider giving up the chase.

He remembered clearly what happened that day. He was very tired then. He would not have been able to survive for nine days without his strong determination and Mu's assistance.

The red-tailed beast was alert and cunning, with astonishing stamina. Even after nine days of continuous pursuit, the creature showed no signs of fatigue. It seemed to understand Han Jia's weakness, and always flew into areas with many obstacles.

This spelled much suffering for Ye Chong, who had to keep up his concentration in order to avoid the floating rocks all around him. That was why he was exhausted physically and mentally

sooner than expected.

There was another concern, and that was the food supply. Han Jia's food storage was always full, as it was Ye Chong's habit. Besides, he had quite a number of nutrition pills. However, he had to take into account the return journey. Besides, there was always the possibility of losing his way in the Calamitous Asteroid Belt. Allowing for some unexpected incidents, the food he had was barely enough. After all, long distance travelling in outer space was meant to be done with starships, not mechs.

At Han Jia's maximum speed, nine days of flying amounted to a very huge distance. This meant that they were deep inside the asteroid belt by now. Mu had warned Ye Chong time and again that the further in they went, the more likely it was for them to lose their way. Even with Mu's help, the probability of losing their way right now was already at 41 percent.

However, just when Ye Chong decided to turn back, the feed from the holographic screen made him stop in his tracks.

After days of escaping, the red-tailed beast did not look so good as well. Its black outer shell gleamed with a faint metallic glimmer, much fainter than when Ye Chong first saw the creature. Its crimson red eyes still looked obstinate and alert, but the veins that began to show in the eyes indicated that it was not at its best. The creature's body looked shrunken and weaker, like it could give up at any time. Only the red tipped tail continued to shine brightly and threateningly.

The creature seemed to have sped up. The minor change immediately got Ye Chong's attention. After days of pursuit, he was getting used to their normal flying speed and rhythm.

In front of the creature was a innocent looking rock. The rock was not particularly large, about three meters across and roughly spherical, with an inconspicuous dark brown exterior.

The red-tailed beast behaved oddly for the first time in their long

chase. Ye Chong stopped whatever he was occupied with and observed closely.

The red-tailed beast approached the rock, and stabbed its tail into the rock. The tough rock seemed to be easily penetrated by the creature's tail. The tail went all the way in, and Ye Chong gasped at the spectacle.

What was the creature doing? On the one hand, he was surprised by the strength of the creature's tail, and on the other hand, he could not understand what it was doing.

The red-tailed beast rattled its tail. Crack! The rock fragmented into dozens of pieces and exploded outwards. It was chilling to watch.

The red-tailed beast now held in its tail a fist-sized yellow rock that glowed faintly.

A transmuted energy ore! Ye Chong recognized what it was immediately, surprised by what he saw. These transmuted energy ores often stored a significant amount of energy. Before this, he managed to gather a lot of these transmuted energy ores from the underground cave. That was also where he obtained a few teardrop mineralite, encountered the eerie black hole, the eight-fingered hand, and that chilling screech.

"Ye, it's an energy ore!" Mu sounded surprised.

Ye Chong nodded without replying. His expression turned grim, and he began to feel nervous.

The red-tailed beast looked excited, and swallowed the transmuted energy ore without delay.

Ye Chong felt his heart skip a beat!

Right after that, he watched with horror at the red-tailed beast's transformation. The shrunken muscles on the creature turned robust in an unbelievable speed, and the flesh that began to fester around the wound that Ye Chong left on it began to heal crazily

fast. The creature's dim outer shell began to shine with life again.

In just a short instant, the red-tailed beast seemed to be revitalized. Without the light red flesh that now healed over the wound, Ye Chong would have thought that it was all an illusion.

After the transformation, the red-tailed beast suddenly turned around and looked at Han Jia, which was still approaching it.

The fatigued red eyes were now lively and alert, they looked sharply at Ye Chong with an intense yearning for revenge.

It seemed to consider charging towards Han Jia, but after a moment's hesitation, it turned back round and darted off ahead.

"Mu, it swallowed a transmuted energy ore," Ye Chong said with a hint of disbelief in his voice.

"Yes," Mu sounded unmoved as usual, "It looks like Fei Si's report is reliable. The creature is most likely evolving."

"Evolving ..." Ye Chong seemed to have thought of something. "Seems like it could detect where the transmuted energy ores are."

"The mechanism behind this behavior is still unknown, but based on what we have seen, it seems to be the case. The probability is between 60 to 90 percent," Mu replied him.

"Mu, if it can find enough transmuted energy ores, will it be able to complete its evolution?" Ye Chong asked.

"Based on Fei Si's theory, evolution required two elements - pure energy and metals. On the other hand, we do not know the required amount of each element for evolution to complete. However, given the environment in the Calamitous Asteroid Belt, and the fact that there are no natural predators, the probability for the creature to complete its evolution is significant, higher than 67 percent," Mu offered his analysis calmly.

Ye Chong understood the mech's point. The Calamitous Asteroid

Belt was aptly named, but it was in fact also a treasure trove. Here was a sea of countless of rocks, containing all kinds of precious ores. If it wasn't for the dangers that lurked within, the place would have been invaded by mining ships. To this creature, however, the place was like heaven. Ye Chong knew that so long as it did not encounter any large scale disasters like the asteroid whirlpool, the other animals would generally not pose a threat to the red-tailed beast. The creature could detect energy ores, and would probably have no trouble detecting metal ores as well. If it had spend enough time in this place searching for energy and metal ores, it would soon complete its evolution.

Ye Chong was still chilled by his memory of the eight-fingered red-tailed beast he saw in the underground cave. Just a screech was enough to stop even Mu. Even though he had improved a lot since, he was still barely on par with Mu. Ye Chong would not wish to face such a dangerous creature ever.

This red-tailed beast he was chasing now was still far less powerful than the eight-fingered creature he encountered, but it had the potential to become one. No matter how one looked at it, the creature had an extensive memory, and was not the type to forget. The intense emotions of hatred and revenge in its eyes reminded Ye Chong constantly that it was a growing time bomb!

Based on past experience, the best to solution against this kind of threat was to nip it in the bud. Ye Chong decided right then to kill the red-tailed beast before it ever reached its final stage of evolution.

It was now the 24th day. Ye Chong had continued his pursuit for 24 days. It was like a long game of hide and seek between the red-tailed beast and Ye Chong.

In the 15 days that came after, Ye Chong did not allow the red-tailed beast to feed again. Mu's excellent scanning system allowed him to detect energy and metal ores in the rocks as well. With Mu's extra long distance shooting, he would destroy any rock that the

red-tailed beast found and targeted! Everytime the scattered remains of the rock exploded in its face, the red-tailed beast would look pained, perhaps from the physical blows, or perhaps by the thought of losing its meal.

Hence, in the 15 days since Ye Chong witnessed it feeding, the red-tailed beast never ate another energy ore. Its body no longer shine so brightly, and it began to fly slower. Ye Chong was like a skilled hunter, patiently stalking his prey. With Mu's assistance, the red-tailed beast grew weaker and weaker, with no chance of nourishment.

The creature had tried a few times to turn back and face its pursuer to fight, but every time it did this, it could never find the strange pursuer. This greatly discouraged the creature.

More importantly, it was now facing another predicament!

Chapter 461: The Ferocious Mech Squad

It had been surrounded, a more precise word would be "besieged", by 30 metallic figures that looked rather similar to the one which broke its cradle in the first place. The sight was growing hopeless to the beast. The situation already felt hellish when it encountered the one knife-wielding machinery at first, now there were more, 30 of them.

Had the creator of this world decided to end its life there?

The beast regained its serenity. Knowing its fate, its arms crossed over its shoulders, as soundlessly it hovered in the space, at center of the siege formed by the 30 machineries. Its expression was undisturbed, yet its shaking tail with a raised tip and its quivering pupils had exposed the fear of death as well as the desperation for an escape within itself.

The beast intended a gush from the fishnet!

Because of its worsening condition and that metallic figure who stood in the dark with the deadly weapons, a gush did sound far-fetched at the moment.

It was indeed not an easy job to do.

Sneered the beast which had given up the thought of escaping alive. Its tail glowed redder than ever, in desolate vain to flaunt its one-of-a-kind beauty, as if recognizing the moment being the last of its life.

Yet strangely, the expected crowd attack did not happen.

Did the machineries aim to capture me alive?

Thought the red-tailed beast, as its eyes grew colder.

Hidden within the shards of asteroid, Ye Chong was finding the scene odd.

There were... actually mechs here? Not only a single mech too...

a school of 30 mechs... in Calamitous Asteroid Belt, the deadliest place of the universe?

It was really strange. Yes, there would be squads who came for space-expedition to grab some loots for the moneybags but no squad should be insane enough to venture into the depth. Ye Chong knew the depth well enough after spending the last few days wandering here. The depth was far more dangerous than what he heard from the people outside. If it was because of Mu's guidance or the red-tailed beast's sense of danger, Ye Chong probably had lost his lives countless times.

He took a look at the mechs, which their models appeared to be model to him. These mechs resembled nothing of the 3 aristocrats.

He then sank within the shade of one giant rock, as he watched the situation.

Certainly Ye Chong did not expect the mechs to be capable of eliminating the beast. He piloted Han Jia to sneak towards the crowd.

"Mu, any info on those mechs?" muttered Ye Chong.

"No," replied Mu.

So from where these mechs came from? Ye Chong was feeling odd. It was the calamitous space zone after all, only the real pilots would risk their lives coming in as if cake walk. But these pilots did not appear to be under the aristocrats, while their mechs had a rather bizarre design. That aside, he should be figuring out a way to eliminate the red-tailed beast before things became handful.

Under the cover of the giant rock, Han Jia arrived behind the beast with stealth. It was not the time to strike yet. It simply was not. Ye Chong knew it after days of hunting the beast, which appeared to be the one of few most alert creatures he had ever encountered.

Behind the rock, Ye Chong took a better look at these mechs.

... (Meanwhile) ...

Scholes was the leader of the scouting group under Arwa. And Arwa had been leading the entire second army consisted of different trained groups ever since he took over the commandership. Reformation had been done with Arwa's leadership, with extra attention on the scouting team which only members of no more than 9 remained after the massive dismissal conducted. Scholes was fortunate enough to be the one of the only few "survivals" from the waves of reformation who managed to even grab the flag. He did not hold spite towards the changes however.

The reason was simple.

Who exactly was Arwa you ask?

He's the strategist! The most talented one at Gray Valley!

It felt like a dream when people heard him in the army as the leader. His charisma would convince even the greatest man to be his little serviceman. But well, if one were to mention about the real dignified figure in the troop, the figure would not be Arwa, but the mistress herself.

Regarding Arwa's motive of joining Xiao Wan's alliance, lots of theories had been heard among the people. Some claimed that Arwa fancied the beauty of the mistress, while the others stated that Arwa coveted the heavenly offer made by the mistress of Xiao family. It was indeed the hottest topic at that period whether it was true or not.

The members of the family army were very clear of the truth however. There was no love, no greed involved between them, only one simple loss to a gamble. Arwa had technically lost his bet and agreed to stay back to take over the second army. The leader of the first army remained as Bei Guang, certainly.

The moment Arwa was announced to be the commander of the

second Xiao family army, the whole Gray Valley almost crumbled.

And now they were on an operation, with Scholes leading the intelligences. Scholes had a rather hefty body, looking more sizable with his 180 centimeter height. His eyes expressed an unperturbed solemnity. He had never failed an operation ever since he was given the leading flag.

The current situation was a little handful for him however. "Are there actually enemies here?" he frowned. The unknown creatures had been a pain in their eyes since these monstrosities had showed up disrupting the harmony after eradicating seven forces in Gray Valley. The catch was, the monsters had only gotten more handful ever since.

Fortunately the research team had formed a massive group in alliance with all talents from the forces around, dedicated to eliminating the unidentifiable creature. The group had also received a substantial fund from the research team of Xiao family itself.

Arwa was afraid of raids occurring at the side wings of the alliance army so he allocated a large flock of scouting units at both wings. And definitely he was right at his worries, the unknown threat indeed existed.

"Any other enemies?" asked Scholes profoundly with fret tumbling inside him.

"No sir. Within the proximity of 150 kilometers, no other enemies had been detected."

Then... is this beast a lone entity?

"All units take caution, into battle station!" Even though Arwa was not aware of how a creature that travelled in packs ended up alone being surrounded, he made his combat order. It would not be easy to take out this red-tailed monstrosity. But Scholes believed that they should have a better time as the beast was clearly

outnumbered, a 30 vs 1. The research team had also discovered that the beast was not 100% invulnerable towards energy-based firing, as there was actually a limit to its energy absorption ability, once the limit was reached, any extra energy-based firing would deal solid damage.

Apparently, people outside the Gray Valley had named the monster as the red-tailed beast. It did not sound like a proper name but it did come from somewhere called Planet Yi Ju which was the only place where such beast had been exterminated, under the attack of a really... strange army called the Collision army... The world wanted to know what happened behind that fortress but it was too hard to overcome the defense so there was little to none information regarding them. There were all kinds of stories regarding the army, but that was not the main point. In short, people had accepted such plain name.

Red-tailed beast.

According to his previous experiences with the beast, under normal circumstances, a firepower formed by all 10 ranged units should be able to take the beast out, let alone 30 of them. "All units fire!" Scholes launched his attack.

Hundred beams showered upon the red-tailed beast, like a spotlight for its death. Glaring the dark space turned as flares blinded the place.

Scholes sighed in relief. He witnessed the scene, with clarity that the red-tailed beast did not dodge. It should not survive.

Wait, what?

Scholes's pupils enlarged as popped at the projection.

How in the Gray Valley...

After the beams faded out, the red-tailed beast was at the previous position, hovering, unharmed.

Chills ran down the neck of Scholes as magic somehow had

occurred.

The red-tailed beast, hovering at the center of the siege a moment ago, had vanished, right in front of everybody.

"Ah!" A shriek was heard in the channel.

"Vegan!" The eyes of Scholes twitched in anger.

The young folk in his early 20s, his smile was friendly and bashful, had become a no-more.

"All units change your weapons, a 3x3 now!" rampaged Scholes.

The mechs had switched their weapons, going for a close-ranged formation. With the melee weaponry, triangular formations were spotted, with three mechs at a unit each.

The parry, the cover and the guard, in a formation of three musketeers the mechs charged.

And there Ye Chong was, all dazzled by the quick switch of armory by the little squad as he watched them behind the rock. He was surprised by how the squad coped with the situation so promptly. The switch of weapon was truly a game changer. The attack type switch from ranged to melee perplexed Ye Chong however. Clearly those mechs were ranged units by default, but why? Why would the leader think of using melee weapons?

After a moment of observation, Ye Chong finally knew why. The switch of weapon that became the salvation to their losing fight highly relied on their one-of-a-kind formation. The triangle would form an active circulation, where one unit would perform contact with the red-tailed beast while the other two would deliver extra hits from the sides. When one poked and retreated, the other would make a strike, the cycle continued.

The amazing part was how these mechs fought the red-tailed beast so fearlessly that it almost felt like a suicidal fight. They were willing to poke the beast and initiate a new cycle to gain more time for their mates to ready the following attacks.

The other triangles would also give a brief assistance or two if the musketeers faced issues during the process.

They might not be the greatest pilots, but they did have the bravery of the greatest. Ye Chong could not help but to compliment their ferocious formation.

Well, the red-tailed beast was going to lose. Ye Chong could see that. The red-tailed beast had stuck itself inside the triangle. The red-tailed beast was strong enough to wound the three units, in which one had lost its arm because of the tail attack and the others were heavily damaged. The mech that lost its arm was under a very dangerous situation as the circuits had been exposed to the space, an explosion could occur at any second. The pilot did not seem bothered however, as the pilot carried on punching the red-tailed beast with the last arm.

The other triangles appreciated the sacrificial strikes from their mate. They had completed another formation at all four directions.

Boom!

One of the heavily damaged units had blown up.

The shockwave produced was able to shake the red-tailed beast as it rolled into the new formation. That was also when the other two damaged allies joined the stars in a consequent explosion.

That was ferocious.

Ye Chong was shocked. It was rare to see someone being so ferocious in achieving goals, and everyone seemed the same ferocious throughout the squad.

The red-tailed beast shall be doomed.

It could no longer make any move. It got stuck. The close-combat units would have destroyed it within seconds if it was not the fact that the beast tried struggling, fully utilizing its agility and iron tail.

And the other mechs had freed from the triangle formation as they got into their battle position, transforming into a cage of firepower, enveloping the beast, shrinking.

A few seconds later, the red-tailed beast had new scratches over its body.

Ye Chong felt sentimental of the situation, not because of the fate of the beast but how a group attack would work wonders nevertheless. It took Ye Chong forever to make a single slash on the red-tailed beast with his pair of super daggers made out of probably the strongest mineral in the galaxy, yet it only took the squad seconds.

And the situation changed, before Ye Chong finished sighing.

Chapter 462: Unwilling - Scholes from the Scouting Group

The crimson tip of the tail slashed through the void, like a strike of bloody lightning, right onto the waist of a mech. The metallic coating was not able to provide the mech the necessarily robust to take the strike well. A quick flick by the tail and the mech had shattered, with its remnants splashing onto its allies nearby.

That was the 9th mech the beast had destroyed.

And that was not game-changing enough for the beast as one could discern all the bleeding scratches over its shrunken epidermis and dull flesh. The only recognizable part of its former glory was probably the glowing tail which somehow shone brighter after tasting the demise of the others.

The fight had intensified since then, as people apparently had lost their mind trying to take that beast down. The situation somehow had lost control, that even Ye Chong decided to stay at stealth.

This little group of mechs were all ranged units by default, yes, their unique formation might be capable of providing the versatility in the field but they still were not born to do close-combats. It took them real blood and sweat to corner the beast.

It was literally a life for a life!

Ye Chong could not help but to exclaim at their brutality.

The beast had been driven up the wall in fact, as it no longer took the attacks with dodges but thrashes. Wielding its indestructible tail, at every thrash the beast made, a new scratch would appear over its body while one more mech would blow up immediately.

The fight seemed ever-ending. Scratches were increasing, whereas the foes were decreasing in number. It was no more a fight of offense but pure endurance.

Ugh. The eyes of the red-tailed beast twitched, as it felt a drastic pain sliding over its abdomen. The beast did not back off as it held the mech forcibly with its tail raised and stung the foe. Like a spear, the tail pierced the mech's body and unexpectedly the mech dropped its weapon and clasped the beast promptly. Both of them tumbled and the mechanical hands were grabbing the two hands of the beast. The scene looked odd, as if it seemed to be about love and war between the machine and the beast. But nobody at the scene was amused by it.

Scholes and his teammates were having their eyes peeled, as they backed away from the center of the battle and chained up to form a circle.

The red-tailed beast kept struggling, but it had long lost the strength to fight back with its body, eventually its tail was stinging randomly, piercing the iron threat again and again, which every sting carried a few gears and nuts away. The mech was as if one from Trash Planet, technically a trash itself, yet its mechanical arms remained gripped over the beast tightly.

Ye Chong was impressed by the bravery of the pilot. The cabin had been penetrated by the beast at least thrice and probably the pilot would survive with a likelihood of less than 1% inside. Nevertheless, he fought not for his life but for a greater likelihood of his teammates.

Ye Chong's pupils shrunk as his hands slowly reached the control panel.

Phew...

He started adjusting his respiration. He took a deep breath and he felt ready to jump into action. His eyes gradually opened as he captured every bit of the happening in the projection.

He was anticipating, the chance to make that one deadly kill!

Certainly he had no idea what upcoming plans these suicidal

units had but he was pretty sure that these members of the ferocious squad would not forsake the opportunity seized by their dying teammate.

The red-tailed beast started to feel the weight lifting from the grip, as its tail searched the inside of the mech. The beast was very confident that once enough drilling had been made, the metallic threat would be exiled, permanently.

But Scholes did not want that to happen.

"Charge!" shouted Scholes manically, as he was no more the less-talker, the one bound by discipline. Veins were bloating over his body, as he pulled his throat, screaming on top of his lungs, leading his members, charging forward.

The mech flexed, armed with a melee weapon, zooming towards the red-tailed beast.

"Charge!!!" The other members had joined the spiritual scream of their leader in the communication channel.

The remaining mechs fell upon the red-tailed beast one after another like a meteor shower.

The red-tailed beast mustered all its strength to escape the attack, yet the piece of junk had hold it back from moving an inch. The mech had only half of its body left but was managed to clench onto the beast till the end. It was then Scholes's alloy sword passed the abdomen of the beast.

The beast felt the rush of heat surging through its opened abdomen, as blood squirted like the pain. The cut was deeper than the previous, which it would hit the intestines another 5 centimeters deeper.

Somehow, perhaps because of the intensity facing death, the red-tailed beast had unleashed its maximum once again.

Its red eyes had gone bloody while its crimson tail had glowed hotter, as its body ballooned dramatically with its muscles pumped

vigorously. The blood capillaries had broadened, the face had been squeezed into something unrecognizable other than agony.

Snap.

Its shoulders withdrew as the remaining body of the mech snapped with a crisp.

The beast twisted its body and dodged the mech speeding towards it, with its tail ready for action again.

Thump! A dent was seen on the passing mech.

The red-tailed beast gently broke the two remaining arms over its body.

The following sequence gave a shock to Ye Chong. The red-tailed beast acted rapidly, other than the first mech that gave its abdomen a slash, the remaining units could not even scratch it.

Oh no...

Ye Chong was going to launch itself, but he did not, upon the change of events.

These mechs could put up with the beast only because of their strange tactics which put the beast within their siege in the first place. With their impeccable formation, the speed and dexterity of the beast could not be seen. And they had discarded their formation a long time ago. A beast in a free space was not something they could handle with mere force, especially when they had lost half of their units.

The situation had changed and surely the outcome was undeterminable.

Ye Chong stayed calm and remained seated as he viewed the wild match. The outcome of the squad was none of his concern, despite the little admiration he had in them. He had seen countless deaths all the years and no doubt dying with glory would be the best bet for most losing fights.

He had his focus on the red-tailed beat, as looking for that opportunity to interrupt the match.

The red-tailed beast might be at an upper hand in this but Ye Chong could see the possibility of this inflated animal rupturing!

The red-tailed beast was not at full health at the beginning of this fight. Ye Chong had been hunting it down for the past few days. It would be solely unnatural if the beast could remain kicking alive.

The beast was fighting with maximum aggression as it broke through the 3x3 triangular formations effortlessly with its speed. And in a second it had penetrated 6 units in the space.

The beast did learn from its mistake as it would make its runaway after every touch on the foe, which failed the suicidal attempt of those pilots.

But was it true that the beast would win?

Maybe not.

Thought Ye Chong, who observed the scene as if the hunter watching the hare hunting the fox.

As expected, the beast was slowing down. Scholes and his team might not discern the change in speed but certainly Ye Chong felt the strength ebbing away from the beast.

Another 6 units, destroyed.

The beast decelerated drastically, with each turn it made becoming more and more lethargic, that Scholes could now see the beast weakening, yet unfortunately he was remained with only the last 3 units.

They were almost there... Just a little bit more and they would win, yet their defense was thin as paper...

After so much sacrifice, so much agony, Scholes clenched his fist, unwilling to accept defeat.

Chapter 463: The Back of Various Colors

He set his eyes upon the beast which had been going after the last two members in his squad. An overwhelming grief had emerged in him. For this fight, a majority of his army had been wiped out after giving their very best shot, they had been sacrificed, for safety of their homeland.

Yet...

Their goal...

Was so near... yet so far...

The leader glanced upon the scraps hovering in the space, containing with the broken limbs and what not. He almost could hear the final shout of his soldiers before they joined the stars. It was the place where his allies rested and probably it would be the same for he himself.

It was fate, that he would be welcomed with a premature demise to his glory.

Soundlessly a mech traveled to the back of Scholes. Scholes on his mech was unaware of the uninvited guest, likewise the remaining allies were.

Looking at how the beast was having a fun time playing with his mates, Scholes was enraged as it was none other than pure blasphemy to the military. He gave a tap on the interface and launched the energy shooter!

The beam landed upon the dark shell of red-tailed beast accurately, causing little flash in the void which later revealed the unhurt beast after fading away. The strike did not cause damage but unnecessary attention as a result.

The beast was alerted of Scholes's existence and it seemed displeased with its large bloodshot eyes.

Scholes maintained his position and let the beast charge towards him. His hands were away from the handle, unintended to make a move.

The red tail was shining brightly in the dark like the sun.

The distance between them was decreasing rapidly as the silhouette of the beast grew clearer on Scholes's projection. For some reason, he felt inner peace upon the scene.

Perhaps, he would be joining the stars with his allies here.

He thought with a weak smile on his face.

But he would not want to make a pointless sacrifice. It might be a meaningless attack on the beast with his firepower alone but he was a pilot and as a pilot, one would fight till the end.

The report regarding the beast had been successfully sent to their base. Arwa the commander should have received it at this moment. And this was a little relief for Scholes.

At least he had done something. He had fulfilled the last few responsibilities being the leader of the scouting team. And now, he would fight till the end, to die in glory as what true pilots would do.

His eyes were glowing with spirit as he looked at the charging beast. His fingers landed upon the interface as his nose formed frost on the visual. He was waiting, waiting for that very second the beast made contact with his mech. Some may ask why he did not try to evade, it was simple - one did not evade oneself from a strike coming with a supreme speed like this.

But little did Scholes know, there was one mech right behind him, firmly attached like a remora with the same exact posture as his mech.

It was Ye Chong.

Ye Chong stared at the approaching beast calmly. His former

plan was to wait behind this mech for the moment the beast attacked it, but miraculously the pilot of the mech somehow read his mind and had lured the beast to himself.

Would that mean Ye Chong had been discovered?

That did not matter. He wanted a hunt and he was there to get it.

He looked at the beast that seemed to be decelerating drastically as losing its glow. Its muscles were also deflating, looking feeble than before.

"That should be a side effect of its biological behavior," Mu stated, which fit Ye Chong's speculation, "Under normal circumstances, an overly excited organism would suffer from a rather undesirable side effect after the end of the strong energy influx."

"Mhm, all its attributes are dropping." Ye Chong seemed rather agreeable in this, "Too bad, we would have a better chance if the beast took out the two mechs first."

"Your proposition is grasping," stated Mu indifferently.

Well as grasping as it may sound, it was just a proposition, which came out of Ye Chong's mouth randomly. The war field was always ever-changing to him, he could not make a bargain when there was an opportunity fair enough.

Ye Chong's pupils shrunk as he anticipated the arrival. He was well-prepared for an assassination.

Scholes's eyes were soulless. His heart was pumping slow. His mech was in a typical battle stance, where it had shield on the left and sword on the right while making a slight bow on its body.

The beast was too fast! It was at least a few times faster than Scholes. He did prepare himself to embrace the attack but the speed was still a shocker to his eyes. The beast was so fast that its silhouette had lost its shape, turning blurry like an illusion.

It is time!

"Hah!" Scholes shouted as he pulled the trigger. All the trainings he had undergone years before were meant for this moment!

The cabin was roaring with the alarms, the flashing red lights were intensifying the atmosphere.

His mech had been penetrated, as expected from the tail. But Scholes did not bother his leaking air as he punched in the following command smoothly.

The left arm first withdrew itself, while the shield sprung upon the face of the beast. Under the shield, the mech's sword awaited.

Thup! The shield slammed the beast right in the face. Scholes was feeling joyful of the first step succeeding. It took him a while to plan this. The shield would be an undercover for his lethal attack!

He made a swing.

It's the end! The end!

His sword was feeling light however. The expected blow was not there. His mind blanked the moment he realized he missed.

That was his only opportunity to save his mates.

And he failed.

He tried everything yet it turned out to be pointless. The beast was too fast. He was very sure that the sword was right on the waist of the beast, nevertheless he missed. The beast could doge his attack despite the injury.

Scholes could hardly say a thing, as his swollen eyes looked at the screen in disbelief. His hands were gripping the control panel, so tight that the blood flow had been held, paling.

"No way..." he muttered, his head was wailing like the alarm in the cabin. "Impossible..." He could not figure how it happened.

He wanted to run for his mates but that beast... was there, not too far ahead, hovering... in pieces... with its head facing right at Scholes. The reddish eyes had dimmed out. The pieces seemed to be made by a highly sharp blade.

What had happened?

What had happened in the world?

Scholes looked at the surrounding in bewilderment. Nothing alive was around.

Then... how... how di-

"Leader! L-leader! Take a look! Radius vector at 44 degrees, photon mode!" The surviving mate shouted in excitement.

Vector to 44 degrees...

Turn on photon visualization...

Scholes made the adjustment accordingly, ignoring the wailing alarm.

And there he saw a strange-looking mech zooming away from the scene. Because of the limited resolution of photon mode projection, he could not make out the exact appearance of the mech, all he saw, was its tiny back of various colors.

...(Meanwhile)...

"Well, Mu, we finally got food." It was not a wild goose chase after all. Han Jia was indeed given a large food supply in the beginning but most of them had been consumed during the course in the last few days. Ye Chong probably would be starved till death if he did not get himself supplied soon enough.

The run was successful and he got what he wanted. He managed to discover one storing unit of nutrient capsules among the scraps before he left the field. And sure he was feeling great.

"Mhm, still, Ye, we need to find a place with actual supply. Furthermore, we need to obtain a reliable reference on our current

coordination," said Mu.

"So... you need this you say?" Ye Chong pointed at the few pieces of mech entangled in thorns. These almost disposable components seemed to contain the important information both Mu and Ye Chong needed. Apparently they were once a part inside the processor.

"Yes, Ye. But first we have to remove the microchip inside."

"Remove?" Ye Chong looked at the giant piece and wanted a confirmation, "Mu, you mean, you need me to take the tiny piece out of this giant metallic object?" He could do any parts without problem, except for the processor, which was known to be the most complicated component in a mech. Removal of certain components would require extreme care and skills.

"You are correct."

"There is no facility specialized for this. There is no tool and all I have is a pair of giant mechanical arms and you want me to take the piece out? It's like asking me to make a club sandwich with Han Jia's daggers. The piece will shatter before I even placed a finger on it."

"I know it is challenging, but Ye, we have no other option," stated Mu calmly, indirectly highlighting the fact that ranting would not help the situation. "To increase the success rate, I suggest you to take a few more pieces. If it breaks, it would be a practice for a better chance on the next. You did take my suggestion without consideration, it is motivating."

Ye Chong looked at the floating pieces resting in Han Jia's giant hand. He could not help but to sweat.

"Oh, by the way, Ye, I have a good news for you."

"What kind?" All Ye Chong had in mind was a feasible method to remove a tiny piece out of the broken component. His reply was half-baked just to keep the conversation going.

"Shang's reorganization seemed to be completing and according to our agreement, we would be having a switch. He would be by your side for the next Hundred And Fifty Three days. Enjoy while it lasts."

"Which part of that equals to good news!?" muttered Ye Chong. Shang was so influential that mentioning his name alone could give Ye Chong headache.

Chapter 464: Gray Valley

Shang's recalibration was not done yet. Ye Chong did not have to handle that problem. What he needed to do now was solve another particularly difficult and technical problem - given that he was without any tools, how should he remove a photon processor chip without damaging it?

This was a very hard problem. However, technical problems would hardly trouble Ye Chong for long. What could really stump him were problems that involved people.

This time was no exception.

After destroying two remnant pieces, Ye Chong finally succeeded in extracting the photon processor chip from the third piece of remnant. Ye Chong had used the skeleton tips from the tentacles on Han Jia's back in the process. They were his indispensable tools.

It took Ye Chong quite some time to figure out how to maneuver the flexible tentacles precisely. After days of practicing with the mechanism, he finally got used to maneuvering the tentacles with ease. Ye Chong had a habit - he would always relate anything he knew about with combat.

After extracting the chip, he considered about ways to improve the variety of attacks using the tentacles.

Mu was busy with hacking past a security algorithm that protected the chip. They needed information from this chip. In fact, the best way to get information was to capture the three survivors. However, Ye Chong did not do so, for reasons he did not know himself.

Mu's hacking smoothly progressed. The algorithm was hardly challenging with his superior calculation skills. He was soon able to make a copy of all the information contained in the chip.

"Ye, I know where we are now," Mu interrupted Ye Chong's train of thought.

Ye Chong turned his attention to the mech. "Where? Did you find a star chart?"

"Yes, have a look yourself." Right then, a star chart was projected onto the holographic screen, which showed various planetary objects of different sizes.

"The terrain here is very unique," Ye Chong commented after studying it for quite awhile. The environment displayed in this star chart was unlike any he had seen before.

Planets with a faint red glow in the star chart were inhabited. These planets were surrounded by a dense cloud of gray colored dots. Ye Chong recognized it immediately as the Calamitous Asteroid Belt.

The inhabited planets were all located in the center of the asteroid belt, completely surrounded by asteroids. Ye Chong was intrigued by whoever first discovered the place, to be able to find a place for live to flourish within a place that was known to invite death.

"We are right here." At the edge of the region where the inhabited planets were all gathered, a blue spot glowed, indicating their location.

"How far are we from the nearest planet?" Ye Chong asked. For the moment, their highest priority was to replenish their supplies. Han Jia had no issues, since it was powered by teardrop mineralite. Mu and Shang, however, needed to recharge. Ye Chong also had to perform extensive maintenance work on Han Jia. After so many days of flying in the Calamitous Asteroid Belt, Han Jia was damaged in many places. The asteroid belt was truly as dangerous as its name suggested. Han Jia was an excellent mech, and Ye Chong a competent mech pilot. Mu was also instrumental in warning them of imminent danger. That was they all survived the

asteroid belt. Now, however, Han Jia's damages needed to be mended.

"About 18 days of flight," Mu answered after doing his calculations. Han Jia was not equipped to make warp jumps, so they could only stick to normal space flight.

"Anything else?" Ye Chong asked. Any and all information regarding this unfamiliar place would be invaluable.

"Yes. Based on the information in the chip, it seems that the 19 planets and 15 star clusters that were all inhabited and gathered in the center of the asteroid belt is Gray Valley," Mu provided this shocking revelation.

"Gray Valley ...' Ye Chong muttered to himself. He had heard of this place since he first found his way to the He Yue Galaxy, but he never expected to arrive in Gray Valley in this manner.

Gray Valley, a symbol of mystery to the most of He Yue Galaxy's inhabitants. Aristocrats were feared everywhere in the galaxy, but here they were miscreants to be punished. Gray Valley residents rarely head out, hence the outside world did not know much about them. If He Yue Galaxy's inhabitants knew so little about them, it was only natural that Ye Chong, the isolated persona that he was, barely knew about them too. The only thing he remembered about Gray Valley was their appearance during the virus disaster, the strong and capable Guang Bei and that underground base of operations.

To think that he was once again thrown into unfamiliar territory! Ye Chong was speechless. After all these years, it looked like he was still wandering from place to place.

"Mu, what's our probability of success in returning the way we came from?" Ye Chong asked.

"According to calculations, less than 3.2 percent." Mu's reply ruled out Ye Chong's plan of going back the way they came from.

"There's also something else that's important."

"What is it?"

"Gray Valley is now in a state of emergency, ready for war. They were also attacked by the red-tailed beasts. Therefore, Ye, we must be careful." Mu's warning gave Ye Chong pause.

"They were also attacked by the red-tailed beasts?" Ye Chong asked quickly.

Mu replied, "Yes. The mech squad we encountered earlier is the scouting team from the Xiao Family's 2nd Platoon. Their mission was to search the area for the possibility of small groups of red-tailed beasts infiltrating the place."

"What a mess." Ye Chong was getting a headache. Now that they were in a state of war, it would become difficult for him. Besides, there were the red-tailed beasts to worry about. If the Sang Tribe's Collision mechs were here, he would not be so troubled. However, now that he had lost contact with Sang Pu and the others, he had no choice but to run should he encounter a group of red-tailed beasts.

Long distance travelling in outer space was dull business, but Ye Chong was used to it. He spent time considering his obstacles in the pilot cabin throughout the flight, as per usual.

Ye Chong and Mu's destination was a planet called Henna. This was the closest inhabited planet to them. During the 18 days of flight, Ye Chong encountered a few scouting troops. Fortunately, Mu's holographic scanning system and Han Jia's excellent anti-scanning system allowed them to avoid detection.

The scouting mechs were mostly in squads of 30. Based on the frequency of their encounters with these mechs, Ye Chong and Mu discussed and concluded that planet Henna was probably not in a dire situation, and unlikely to be the frontlines of their battle.

Ye Chong would not wish to rush to the frontlines. All frontlines

of any kind of war promised to be life threatening. No matter how strong he was, he would be helpless against the kind of massive death machine that was war.

"Han Jia needs maintenance." Ye Chong inspected Han Jia and arrived at this conclusion. Many of Han Jia's joints showed minute cracks that would not hamper its performance just yet, but were still nuisances that could lead to disasters. Any strong collisions could make the cracks grow larger.

For now, Ye Chong had no skeletal material at hand, and no maintenance tools. This was an issue for him.

They were now in an abandoned factory on planet Henna. The owner had left the factory, perhaps due to the war. The equipment here were mostly destroyed. There was nothing useful around here.

This was not a problem for Ye Chong though. Having grown up on a trash planet, he had plenty of experience in similar situations. Ye Chong assembled a solar energy converter, after rummaging through the stuff lying around and patching them together. It could convert solar power into a conventional form of energy for charging.

Ye Chong connected the solar energy converter to Mu, and heaved a sigh of relief.

Here in the messy, abandoned factory, Mu stood still as he recharged. The solar energy converter was not very efficient, and Mu would need 36 hours to fully recharge himself. In these 3 hours, Mu would remain quiet and stationary.

Mu and Han Jia stood side by side, while Ye Chong sat on the floor and looked up at the two mechs, and for the moment, was lost in thought.

The rays of sunset reached through the windows into the factory,

reflecting off Han Jia's colorful exterior into a dazzling lightshow. Mu's body was almost imperceptibly glowing . The orange sunset dyed the mech into a charismatic palette of orange and yellow. The mech's amputated arm stood out palpably.

Seeing Mu's lost arm reminded Ye Chong of the good amount of coraplatinum he left in that starship in the free space zone. Back then, he had risked himself obtaining the metal, thinking about using it to rebuild Mu's arm. In the end, however, he lost the starship. Perhaps the young boy had taken the ore, or maybe it was still left in the depths of the sea on planet Dankwood. There was now only one Gateway left open to the free space zone, the one controlled by the Xue Lai Clan. The other two Gateways were destroyed.

Ye Chong did not imagine himself having any leverage to ask for the Clan's permission to use the Gateway. He connected with the young boy, but it would be foolish to think that a child could play any part in helping him in this matter. Besides, he had kidnapped the young boy in the first place.

After sorting out his thoughts, Ye Chong felt that the idea was unrealistic and abandoned it.

He stood up to stretch his limbs. Mu would need 30 over hours to finish recharging. Han Jia's maintenance work would have to be delayed for the moment. Without any suitable material or equipment, all the maintenance work he had in mind could not be carried out.

Just then, he heard a noise from outside.

Chapter 465: Shang's Reasoning

Ye Chong hid behind a damaged part of the wall and peeked out from behind to look outside.

About a dozen golden colored mechs whizzed past the sky. The sound was from their speedy flight across the air. Their velocity slightly surprised Ye Chong. The mechs must be flying at no less than Mach 17 or 18. After all, they were now within the atmosphere. It it was in outer space, even reaching up to Mach 20 was not particularly difficult.

To think that he was lucky enough to see their advanced mechs just as he arrived in Gray Valley! They mechs were now vanishing dots in the sky. Ye Chong watched them in a daze. It was a pity that they flew so fast that he could not make out what they looked like. However, their dazzling gold left a deep impression in him.

Ye Chong returned to Mu and Han Jia's side still thinking about the golden mechs. However, he quickly composed himself and began to work on the technical issues that he was facing.

The atmosphere in the control room was tense. They had just received news from Scholes, informing them of a very powerful red-tailed beast in the Calamitous Asteroid Belt. The situation was dangerous for them.

After receiving the report, Arwa sent out a squad of 300 mechs as reinforcement.

However, they received no word from them until now. Arwa had a bad feeling about it, and he began to feel nervous.

The red-tailed beast had appeared at the border between the asteroids and Gray Valley. What would this mean for them? All this while, he was worried that the creatures would manage to go around their defenses and attack them. That would be a problem.

Now that all the powers within Gray Valley were coordinated by the Research Consortium, they had managed to set up an effective defense. Recently, the attacks from the red-tailed beasts were beginning to falter.

Even though they had not begun to launch their attacks into the purple gas cloud that first appeared and started it all, people were beginning to feel hope. Indeed, what was there to worry about? Morale was high; resources were stocked up; the military was sufficiently manned; the Research Consortium was offering all kinds of technical support. The combatants were also the best of their community. So far, they were doing quite well.

The situation had been quiet so far, except for the daily mech troops deployed by the United Army to engage the legion of mysterious creatures.

Despite all this, Arwa sensed a dangerous undercurrent through it all. He would mention it occasionally during meetings with the commanding officers, but helpless against the indifference that he would receive. In fact, he lacked evidence to prove his suspicions. As the war progressed, the red-tailed beasts received substantial damage. That was certain. They were not like humans, who could resupply themselves almost indefinitely. It was only natural that they were faltering now.

Still, Arwa had sent many scouting squads at their flanks out of wariness. To think that he would receive news of a red-tailed beast sighting today!

What surprised him more was the fact that the scouting squad had been greatly overwhelmed by the creature! Scholes was one of the better mech pilots under him, and his abilities were undoubted. Arwa was very surprised to learn that the scouting squad led by the man would be forced into a desperate situation.

"Sir, reinforcements have reached the 13th scouting squad. They will be back to base in five hours," the operator's report

interrupted Arwa's thoughts.

"However ..." The operator hesitated.

Arwa knitted his brows together. "What is it?"

"According to reports from our reinforcement troops, only three mechs survived," the operator forced the words out of his mouth.

Suddenly, the control room went silent.

Only three survived out of the 30 mechs. It was a fatality rate of 90 percent! What in the world happened?

Everyone in the control room exchanged looks of fear and distress.

Five hours later, the reinforcement troops were back. When the three surviving mechs landed in the base, people finally realized how devastating the fight had been!

Scholes and his two surviving comrades were called to the Commander's Office immediately after they exited their mechs.

Arwa was shaken by the tired, pitiful and scared looks of the three faces he greeted.

"You must be tired! Please have a seat," Arwa spoke gently to the three subordinates. According to protocol, they should have reported to their superiors while standing. Arwa activated his comms and said, "Bring three meals in here. Make sure they're warm." After that, he returned to his own seat.

The three mech pilots looked gratefully at their superior. Half a minute later, food arrived.

Arwa made a gesture. "Please eat first. Your reports can wait."

The trio was ravenous, and ate quickly. Soon, nothing was left on their plates, and they looked much better. The three of them abandoned their empty plates and waited for Arwa to ask his questions.

"Alright, now tell me exactly what happened." Arwa nodded towards Scholes, signaling for him to speak.

"Ye, it's been too long! I have missed you," Shang declared without meaning it at all.

Ye Chong did not expect the one to emerge after recharging to be Shang. This was to be a problem.

"Where are we heading now?" Ye Chong asked, straight to the point.

"Oh, Ye, you're still so boring. Sigh, it's been a long time since we last saw each other, and you don't even try to do some catching up with me, tsk tsk ..." Shang affected a mood of complaint.

Ye Chong was speechless. He decided to ignore the mech. He was thankful that at least he could control whether the mech was out here or not. The alternative was unbearable.

Ye Chong withdrew Shang into his dimension keystone without hesitation.

"Ye, you're too cruel! How dare you put me back into this empty space of nothingness?" Shang sounded resentful.

Ye Chong ignored him completely and went into Han Jia. He activated the holographic scanning system and began to search for the nearest city. Shang continued to mutter constantly to himself, but Ye Chong was determined to ignore him.

Soon, Ye Chong found a city 320 kilometers northwest of their location. He flew Han Jia out and away from the factory without delay and headed in that direction.

Shang seemed to know that his behavior would do him no good, and so he switched tactics. "Ye, what do you think is the first thing we should do when we arrive at the city?"

"Study its surroundings." Ye Chong's answer was brief and to the

point.

"Oh, righto! Ye, I agree with your assessment." Shang sounded exaggerated. He continued asking, "Then how do you think we should go about doing this?"

Ye Chong was confused by why Shang would start asking about these things, but they were practical matters, and so he answered readily, "Take in the landmarks, memorize the landscape of the place." This was a method that Ye Chong has used plenty of times when he first arrived in a new area. History had proven that it was very effective, and Ye Chong had managed to escape from danger many times because of his familiarization with the area early on.

"That's right, that's exactly right. This method will help you tremendously. But, Ye, is that all you can think of?" Shang was now like a cunning man with a bait.

"Oh, what else is there?" Shang's way of asking had hooked Ye Chong's interest.

"When you arrive in a new and unfamiliar place, there are many things to do. Getting familiar with the surroundings, as you say, is one of them. However, there are other important matters that cannot be ignored. For example, getting to know the local forces at play, the relationship between these forces and so on. This will help you avoid getting involved in local power plays, which can be very dangerous. Another example will be the local culture. After all, some local cultures can be dangerous to outsiders. I suggest that you first make a few escape plans, so that when any unexpected incident occurs, you can make better decisions," Shang spoke eloquently.

Ye Chong considered his suggestion and thought they sounded reasonable. "Do continue."

Shang was secretly pleased at Ye Chong's reaction. He was afraid that Ye Chong would ignore him, and that would be just too dull.

"All of that's not enough. Ye, a lion will stand out when it is within a herd of sheep. People will be able tell that you're different from the others very easily. That will invite trouble to you. Wary people will try to probe you, to see if you're dangerous. I must say, Ye, that that will be the beginning of your troubles!" Shang sounded helpless as he came to this conclusion. To him, Ye Chong and Mu were too straightforward and rigid, both in behavior and action. They did not seem to understand the idea of indirect approaches with their confined minds!

"You're right." Ye Chong agreed with Shang. Many times he had gotten into trouble just like that.

"Hehe, Ye, don't panic. There are many solutions aside from calculations to solve these problems. Err, perhaps you can think of it as a situational calculation." Shang sounded pleased with himself.

"A situational calculation?" Ye Chong muttered to himself in thought.

Shang continued, "So, when you first arrive in a new area, it's very important to blend in with the surroundings. A lion will of course stand out within a herd of sheep. But if you can disguise yourself as sheep, wouldn't that make you safer?"

"Yes, you're right." Ye Chong gave it some thought and agreed with him.

Shang suddenly changed his tone. "Of course, there are many other way of self defense. If a lion found itself within a herd of sheep, it can demonstrate its prowess to the sheep so that they would not mess with him. This is what we called intimidation, as discussed before." His tone changed again. "However, I must say, Ye, there are not many sheep here, as most of them are wolves. One wolf might not win against one lion, but a pack of wolves can. Besides, in this time and place, it's very difficult to determine if you're facing sheep or wolves."

Shang's metaphor was simple, but Ye Chong could grasp the idea behind it.

"Do you think what I said make sense?" Shang asked.

"Yes," Ye Chong replied in the affirmative.

"Then, I suggest we use the first method to enter the city. What do you think?" Shang sounded weird.

Chapter 466: Disguise - Not as Easy as it Seems

Ye Chong looked up at the city, and felt a sense of familiarity. This was practically a modernized version of a city from the Five Galaxies. Buildings soared into the skies. Mechs of all kinds tore through the air above. It was the exact opposite of the He Yue Galaxy. As he walked into the city, the feeling grew stronger. There were holographic ad projections everywhere. Countless mechs flew between the metallic buildings. Even the pedestrians on the streets walked with hurried steps. It was very much a city in the Five Galaxies.

"This is Gray Valley?" Shang sounded unbelieving.

Ye Chong shrugged. "I think it's weird too."

Ye Chong was wearing a combat uniform, and did not stand out in the crowd. Along the way to the city, he and Shang had discussed about psychology. Of course, it was only to be expected that Ye Chong failed marvelously to understand it. Suddenly, Ye Chong realized that he was infinitely pathetic when it came to this area of expertise. Right now, he was competent in combat, mech piloting, alchemy and even mech maintenance. However, when it came to psychology and sociology, he could only draw a blank.

Shang had explained with long paragraphs of theories about how important psychology was in combat. Of course, Ye Chong was convinced by him. Convincing Ye Chong can be a simple but challenging task. As long as your arguments were convincing, Ye Chong would agree with them. However, if the arguments were hollow, he would not accept them no matter who they came from.

Ye Chong was not walking on the streets like an inconspicuous commoner, and no one looked twice at him. The holographic screen at the exposed public square was showing the news. Aside from the constant mentions of the war in the news, there were

almost no signs of the war here in the city.

"Ye, this looks like a good place," Shang proclaimed excitedly.

Ye Chong looked around his surroundings and said, "The situation's not clear yet, we need to do more research."

Ye Chong walked the streets casually, seemingly without purpose, but he was in fact memorizing all the streets.

However, they quickly faced an urgent problem - they had no money! Earning money had always been one of the more difficult problems for Ye Chong, and also one of his weaknesses. Fortunately, he had Shang with him now, and there should be nothing to worry about. Back in the Five Galaxies, Mu could provide an almost endless supply of currency, which Ye Chong remembered clearly. Shang must be able to do something similar!

"Well, if I can hack into the virtual world, money will not be a problem," Shang said, but his next words dashed any hope Ye Chong had of this option, "However, Ye, regretfully we do not have that ability as of yet. I tried to hack into their virtual word just now, but failed."

"Failed? Why?" Ye Chong was surprised. Shang's calculation skills were slightly inferior to Mu's, but he was still very good at it. In the past, Shang had always did it with ease. Why would he fail this time?

Shang sounded surprised as well when he replied, "The virtual world here is a bit weird. Their calculations are completely different from what we know, and that means I have nowhere to work with. What a strange place. Oh, forgot to mention one thing. When I entered the virtual world just now, I've triggered their alarm. We need to leave here ASAP."

Ye Chong wanted to roll his eyes. This b*stard ... He was about to pick up his pace and leave the place when Shang's d*mned voice came again, "Ye, don't do anything unnatural. You should walk at a

natural pace, wear a normal expression, and walk away from here casually. That way, you won't attract suspicion. Do you want everyone who see you to suspect that you're a bad guy?"

Ye Chong forced down whatever explosive motion he was about to do with his legs. Despite his masterful control of muscular power, the effort still left him a little uneven.

He stepped out with his right leg and resumed his normal walking pace. His expression did not change, not because he was a master of disguise, but because his face was naturally inexpressive.

"The more natural you behave, the easier people are going to ignore you. You may exist here and now, but you are effectively in a blind spot," Shang philosophized.

Just then, a group of men in yellow uniform walked in their direction.

"So strange, there really was an alarm just now. Isn't it from here? I don't see anyone suspicious," one of them said.

One of his companions shrugged and said, "I don't see anyone suspicious too. Maybe he left already."

"So soon? Impossible," one of them said, unconvinced. "When the alarm rang, we were just around the corner, and didn't see anyone suspicious. I say, the alarm is probably from a technical error."

"Right, right, I think so to, it's happened before ..."

The group of men walked past Ye Chong just like that. One of them took a glance at Ye Chong, and his eyes did not linger.

Shang's theory was effective! If it was his earlier self, he would have ran away right then, attracted attention, and disaster would surely have followed.

Shang seemed to know what Ye Chong was thinking, and said, pleased, "Hehe, Ye, told you so. Nothing in this world is more effective and mystifying as psychology."

Ye Chong did not care for Shang's claim, but he was beginning to be convinced of the importance of psychology.

"Ye, your disguise just now has plenty of room for improvement. Your walking posture, for example. You should step more firmly on the heel than on the toes. And your pulse, breathing frequency, etc etc. If they had a professional spy with them just now, you would have been spotted. A successful disguise involves many aspects, and at its core is psychology." Shang had a particular enjoyment in stepping on Ye Chong's self esteem.

"Alright," Ye Chong replied and began to make adjustments. Soon, he had resumed his natural walking manner.

"Hehe, good, good. Ye, you learn fast. However, when anyone looks at you now, they'll be able to tell that you're someone who's capable in combat."

Ye Chong tilted his head and asked, "Why?"

"Your pace and breathing are very precise. You should know that the average person's pace and breathing fluctuate in some broad range. The truth is, Ye, you are born with traits ideal for disguise. Your body is not particularly muscular, which gives an impression of vulnerability. Your hands show no signs of training, and while they are not as smooth compared to the beautiful ladies, they're still on the fairer side. After all, these are the hardest parts to fake."

Shang was now plenty excited, to discover this interesting puzzle. What joy! Once, Mu had given Ye Chong all kinds of training routines, and he could only watch from the side while Ye went through all of them with rigid commitment. Now he knew how wonderful it felt like! He almost suspected that Mu was secretly enjoying it as well, to come up with so many training routines.

Hmm, perhaps he should start preparing richer content and organized training for Ye Chong. The thought of the wide variety of training routines that Mu introduced to Ye Chong inspired Shang to prepare an even larger scaled training schedule.

Hence, Ye Chong's suffering began.

Stance, breaching, pace, gaze, and even the muscles underneath his clothing - Ye Chong had never experienced a training routine harder than this. Repeating the same combat move for a hundred times was easy for Ye Chong, but how could he maintain a lax gaze for 10 minutes? Ye Chong felt like a tiny drum was constantly playing in his heart. Even five seconds was too long endure, much less 10 minutes.

Five seconds of distraction was enough for him to die half a dozen times! The thought spontaneously came to him every time.

On the contrary, the harder routines that came late were easier for Ye Chong. This include making his eyes look uninterested, but still keeping a high vigilance of his surroundings.

Ye Chong felt like slamming his head against the wall. He had never imagined that it would be so difficult to disguise as someone ordinary. He had very quick reactions, and this sensitivity was his largest obstacle when in disguise. For example, whenever he heard light footsteps behind him, he would automatically prepare himself physically to engage. This combat instinct was already deeply entrenched in him that it was almost second nature.

After a long struggle, his stamina was depleted more than he expected. More importantly, he was mentally exhausted. This training was unlike anything he had done before.

As he walked on the streets, Ye Chong practiced different training routines. In Shang's words, these exercises did not involve any huge movements, and can be done even while walking. The advantages of disguising as an ordinary person were so obvious that it needed neither Shang's explaining nor Ye Chong's figuring out. Hence, Ye Chong practiced disguising as hard as he could. He had a virtue, which was to give his all in learning something once he decided that it would be useful to him.

So far, however, he realized that he did not have much talent in

this field.

Ye Chong abruptly stopped in his tracks and looked up at the huge holographic screen in the public square.

"Urgent hire for close range mech combat instructors - Research Consortium." It was a large block of sentence, with no dazzling light and sound effects. Underneath it in smaller size was an address. The ad stayed on the screen for a whole five minutes.

"Hmm, looks like a good way to earn some money," Shang spoke up in Ye Chong's mind.

"I agree," Ye Chong nodded and said. They had no money at all, and the problem was a significant one. He could only rely on his own since Shang could not enter the virtual world. Ye Chong had actually planned to find a mech maintenance shop and assembly shop to earn some cash.

However, this job as a close range mech combat instructor might be worth a shot.

Chapter 467: Undesired Side Effects

Ye Chong stared at the ad on the holographic screen, lost in thought.

He remembered when he first escaped from the trash planet. In the past, mechs were still new to him. Back then, long range mechs were mainstream in the Five Galaxies, and few people would choose to use close range mechs. Now, he actually saw an ad for hiring close range mech instructors.

He gathered his thoughts and decided to try it out.

Ye Chong never had much luck in asking for the directions in the past. However, under Shang's guidance, he found that everything went smoothly this time. With a polite tone, mellow voice, and a relaxed stance, the passerby that he stopped to ask for directions quickly pointed to him in the right way. Moreover, the person even offered to bring him there.

After accomplishing this, Shang said happily, "Ye, this is the power of socializing. Often, it is more useful than brute force."

Ye Chong silently agreed. Shang was right. Compared to grabbing someone by the throat and demanding for directions, this method was a lot more effective.

Ye Chong began to train even more earnestly. This caused him to arrive at the hiring location in a deep state of fatigue.

It was all too tiring! Shang had required that his disguise looked as natural as possible. This was not a problem for ordinary people, but a huge problem for Ye Chong! He was already used to being calculative and precise, and could control his breathing to be rhythmic with less than a 0.01 second difference between breaths. However, this so-called natural behavior that Shang described, with natural pulse, natural breathing, natural pace, natural muscular state, natural stance, natural gaze ...

The training did not require him to move so much, but it was extremely tiring! Besides, Ye Chong had given his all into this training. Soon, undesirable side effects began to kick in.

Brahm studied the lifeless young man before him, and frowned.

How could people like this come to try out for the position as instructor? He smiled coldly inside. No one had tried to make trouble with the Research Consortium's hiring process so far, but this young man must be quite daring. Given the currently urgent situation, close range mech pilots were one of the highly demanded occupations. Frontline battles did not cease, but the higher-ups had still ordered for them to hire a new batch of close range mech pilots.

Brahm immediately categorized Ye Chong as one of the troublesome youngsters in the neighborhood. He had never heard of any instructors at such a young age, with the exception of a few proteges. As for this particular young man, he looked skinny and sluggish, with eyes that stared blankly and a wooden expression. If this young man can become an instructor, then Brahm himself could very well be promoted to Commander.

Brahm's voice was strict. "We're hiring close range combat instructors here. Unrelated personnel are advised to leave."

The young man seemed unfazed, and did not prepare to leave, while still looking weary and tired.

Ye Chong was feeling extremely exhausted! This exhaustion was unlike the physical kind, but of the mental kind. It was as if there were two personalities inside him, one destroying the other. No wonder Shang had said that physical pain was nothing compared to mental pain. Shang had even given him examples, like interrogations. Only by finding a psychological weakness in the interrogated could one be able to extract the necessary information.

So it was like this! Ye Chong could feel a headache beginning inside his head. His whole body felt heavy and weak, and his condition deteriorated.

There were only six people in the waiting room.

Ye Chong was not in his best condition, but he still managed to take note of his surroundings. He heard the hiring officer's words, but did not think that it was directed to him. Ye Chong found his mental focus becoming more and more hazy.

Unrelated personnel? He was here to be interviewed, and therefore not an unrelated person. Hence, Ye Chong filtered away the words coming from Brahm.

"Are you here for the interview?"

Ye Chong could not understand the hostility in the officer's voice, but he was not offended. Not that he had the energy to get worked up anyway.

"Yes," Ye Chong replied weakly, and resumed his silence. His training required a lot of mental concentration, and his mind was beginning to have a splitting headache. His mental condition was worsening, and his thought process was heavily compromised.

Brahm was furious seeing the young man replying without even looking him in the eye. He wasted no more words and passed a card with the number 231 on it to Ye Chong.

"This is your number. You'll only need to go through a test in actual combat. If you pass, you'll be hired," Brahm explained coldly.

"Okay," the young man acknowledged him and took the card, then entered the waiting room.

Noticing so many people lining up in front of him as he entered the combat test arena, Ye Chong decided to find a spot in a corner and rest. He was too tired, and desperately needed to rest. Shang had not expected the huge strain his training routines had created

for Ye Chong, and was not quickly modifying his training plan accordingly.

The fact Ye Chong had gone to sleep right before facing the test was a deplorable action that all the hiring staff observed with contempt. Since when was the Research Consortium underestimated like this?

There were many forces at play in Gray Valley, but only the Research Consortium held the highest power. They controlled all the latest tech, and had it not stood up when the red-tailed beasts appeared, the current alliance would never have been formed. So far, every round of recruitment by the Research Consortium was attended by capable men and women in Gray Valley, but even the most arrogant of them would not behave in a challenging manner.

If the Research Consortium's own guards were here, they would surely have chased out this young man. Anyone who could join the Research Consortium would be talented, capable, and vain. These days, as the power of the Consortium expanded in Gray Valley, they became even more conceited.

There were many within the Consortium who were against the recruitment this time. However, since demands from the frontlines were urgent, they had to lower their standards and hire close range combatants in large numbers. They had so few close range combatants that it was hard to even allocate some of them as instructors. Hence, right now they needed to hire a group of instructors to train new mech pilots, as preparation for the war at hand.

It was generally believed by the Research Consortium and the Alliance higher-ups that the war would continue on in the near future, and this belief continued to strengthen day by day. It was because of this that the Research Consortium decided to organize close range combat training. Gray Valley did not lack talents, but, just like most other places, long range mech pilots were more prevalent. Fortunately, most of the locals here have good

fundamentals. Almost anyone can become qualified as combatants with the right training. Since close range mech pilots who fought at the frontlines were precious manpower that each force and organization would prefer to keep to themselves, it would be almost impossible to ask for them to become instructors.

Hence, the current hiring round was established.

The staff decided that although they could not outright throw the young man out of the room, there were other ways to teach the arrogant man a lesson.

Ye Chong never imagined that he had unwittingly offended all the hiring staff.

Even if he knew, however, he had better things to worry about. His situation was dire. As he had no experience in his kind of training, it had obviously overwhelmed him. This caused a series of undesirable side effects.

Ye Chong found to his despair that he could not quite focus his thoughts. It was like having worms crawling around inside his head. Even with his eyes closed, he could not rest. It was torturing, not being able to rest despite being so very tired.

If anyone were to attack him right now, Ye Chong was not sure if he could avoid it.

"Who'd have imagined that this training in disguise has such annoying side effects?" Ye Chong thought to himself bitterly. It was fortunate that Shang was with him, or he would have been entirely defenseless.

With his distracted eyes and rigid facial muscles, Ye Chong looked like a century-old zombie. Everyone who walked passed him looked at him with disdain.

"Number 231! Number 231! Please report immediately to the combat zone for your test!" A hiring staff yelled loudly.

Shang spoke up, "Ye, it's your turn."

"Oh," Ye Chong replied weakly, and stood up with shaky legs.

The hiring staff yelled again, "Number 231? Where are you?"

"Here, " a tired voice replied from a corner of the room.

Sweep! Everyone in the room turned to look at the source of the voice. It came from a lazy, weary looking young man half slumped against the wall, with his right hand lifted up shakily.

"Bravo, Ye, bravo!" Shang sounded most excited. "You're now definitely qualified to be the Most Depressed Youngster of the Year!"

Most depressed youngster? What kind of d*mned award was that? Ye Chong did not even have the mood to laugh mockingly to himself. He mind drew a blank. Everything he saw looked like an illusion. The effects of overusing his brain were dead serious!

No matter the time and place, Ye Chong's aura of intensity was hard to disguise, but now he looked like an entirely different person.

Shang was positively exhilarated. "Ye, your disguise now is superb! Tsk tsk, I didn't expect you to learn so quickly. Changing your whole aura is the hardest trick! Hehe, Ye, if some beauty happened to see you now, she'd fall head over heels for you ..."

Ye Chong decided not to reply to Shang. Even keeping his eyes open was a chore right now.

The people around him were giving him glances that spelled condescension, disdain, confusion ...

"What're you standing there for? Hurry up!" The hiring staff looked annoyed.

Ye Chong felt like he was walking in a daydream. The people around him shook like apparitions. Every step felt like a walk on clouds, as though he could stumble at any time.

To the rest of the people, this obvious depressed and tired young

man was walking lazily, with his eyes barely open. The rest of the people who came for the interview shook their heads. How can someone like him be here? It was a joke! Combat skills were necessary for every close range combat mech pilot. Hence, these mech pilots were expected to walk steadily with a focused gaze. This young man was obviously not fit for the task.

The rest of the interviewees looked insulted. To them, the presence of this young man was a humiliation to them all!

The distance from his corner to the combat test arena was only a mere 50 meters, but Ye Chong thought it felt like a mile away.

Phew, finally there! Ye Chong never expected to be weakened to this extent. Just 50 meters had cost him dearly. In fact, Ye Chong could hardly think clearly right now. Had he been more sensible, he would have given up on the job.

Ye Chong stood rigidly in the test arena with his mind blank.

Chapter 468: Instinct

Taylor looked at the spiritless young man in front of him. He was an experienced close range mech pilot, and could of course read his opponents well. What he saw was baffling - what was a man like this doing participating in this test?

There were two parts to the combat test. The first was in hand-to-hand combat, and the other mech combat. Both components were dangerous in their own ways. The hand-to-hand combat test right now could result in minor injuries, or even death.

"Are you sure you want to participate in this test?" Taylor asked the young man out of concern. Taylor was strong and looked brutish, but he was not unkind.

The other man did not react, his eyes half closed. It looked like he was sleeping.

Taylor knitted his brows together, offended. He had warned him out of kindness, but was completely ignored in turn.

With that, Taylor humped coldly, stepped forward and reached out with his right hand towards Ye Chong's shoulder. As the other man did not respond, Taylor decided to just fling him out of the arena.

Taylor's move won the admiration of the hiring staff who were watching. His move was clear cut and fast, as a professional would have done.

Taylor was an examiner, and it was only that he was capable. He had been conducting a few rounds of these combat tests earlier, and the audience had witnessed his moves. Everyone there believed that the young man was about to be thrown out of the arena. However, some of the hiring staff thought that they were too easy on the young man. However, knowing that Taylor was in charge of the test, they kept their thoughts to themselves.

What happened next in the arena was completely unexpected!

Ye Chong's condition did not improve. Shang's training conflicted heavily with his natural instincts. The mental strain on him caused his mind to simply blank out.

However, despite his terrible condition, there was one thing that he had yet to lose!

Instinct! Honed by thousands and millions of training sessions, forged in the crucible of repeated encounters with life threatening battles - his instinct!

Ever since his life began on the trash planet, Ye Chong had grown up with combat as an integral part of his life. After all these years, combat was already second nature to him.

Hence, when he detected the danger that was coming, Ye Chong's body moved on its own.

The rest of his body remained still while his right shoulder pulled back, and his hanging right arm reached up smoothly like a snake, striking towards Taylor's right hand like a thunderbolt. The power of the September Lan Family's secret technique - its second-to-none ability in muscle control was unleashed in all its glory.

If Taylor's right arm was caught by Ye Chong's right arm, the former's arm would surely be broken in several parts.

The unexpected turn of events shocked everyone outside the arena!

Taylor's eyes turned cold. He flipped his right wrist and met Ye Chong's right hand with his.

Slam!

The clear sound of forceful contact reverberated in the entire arena. It was not the sound of punching or blocking, but more like a the crack of a whip.

The clear sound was like the opening note of a melody.

Slam slam slam slam ...

Without warning, a series of thunderclaps sounded rapidly, one after another.

Those who were watching stared in astonishment. They were thoroughly surprised. What was happening now was completely different from what they expected. The two men traded blows in moves so quick that it was hard to make them out individually.

Taylor's attack seemed to have triggered some part of Ye Chong. With the external stimulus, Ye Chong's body reacted in the most natural way - it retaliated!

The battle was unusually fierce. Within the arena, the two men moved quickly, leaving afterimages that blurred out the original fighters. The viewers could only see human-shaped shadows moving about.

However, the unceasing sounds of attacking and blocking one another made the fight even more exciting to watch. Such an awesome battle could hardly be found anywhere. The spectators leaned forward as much as they could, opening their eyes wide, for fear of missing a single detail.

From the looks of it, the two men fought with equal prowess. However, the level of ability that they showed was shocking. How good was Taylor? When he was testing the other interviewees, the people had roughly guessed his worth. However, from this current test, it seemed that the man had hidden most of his full potential. Even the few people who had passed the test earlier paled right now, grateful that they were not tested like this.

Taylor's true strength was impressive, but understandable. After all, how could a person become an examiner without the ability to back him up?

More shocking was the man fighting against Taylor right now - Number 231! From the beginning, everyone had thought that he

was probably some useless hoodlum, but now it seemed that he was actually very strong. Of the few hundred people watching, none could tell that he was faking it. This skill that he demonstrated was an unpleasant surprise to many, and one of them was Brahm. He recalled the way he spoke to the young man earlier and felt a chill ran up his spine.

Finger, wrist, elbow, shoulder, knee, leg - there was no body part that this young man could not twist to his own will. The usual physical logic that bound the average human body did not seem to apply to him.

Close range combat was Taylor's specialty. He never expected to be suppressed by someone else using the same technique!

Suppressed - that was the word. To outsiders, both of them seemed to be equally strong. However, Taylor knew that he was actually completely under the control of his opponent!

The other man could attack in physically impossible ways, his attacks coming from the most unimaginable angles. Moreover, the man had enough power behind his punches. Fighting in this small arena, Taylor could feel that the strength in his opponent's attacks never faltered, while his own hands were growing numb.

A strange body, making strange attacks, but stranger still was the expression on the man's face. It was wooden and inexpressive. The transparent gray eyes looked unfocused. Every time he met the man's eyes, Taylor felt a chill crawling up his spine.

Ye Chong's mind was blank. He did not know what he was doing. His mind was overly exhausted that he succumbed to a state of unawareness. Everything he did was not the product of prolonged combat training.

His condition was a very unusual state. Everything he did was out of instinct. If his body sensed danger, it would immediately react. The reaction was quick, requiring no explicit thought to execute it. That was why, driven by instinct, Ye Chong was able to move so

quickly, and his reactions were more straightforward and sensitive. It was in this state that Ye Chong finally reached a whole new level in terms of the speed of his hands.

Ye Chong's hands could already move at a speed that would astound most people, and now, he was even faster. Taylor could only hold them off with no room to do anything more against his continuous attacks. However, little did he know that, due to lesser attacks from him, the degree of retaliation that he received from Ye Chong decreased as well.

Ye Chong's every reaction was in response to threatening external stimuli. When Taylor could not afford to make any attack moves, Ye Chong fought back less as a result of instinct.

While Taylor could not understand the reason for it, he did notice the pattern, and it was a huge relief. Once he stopped initiating attacks, the opponent would also fight back less.

A couple of times he slowed down in his moves, and as expected, the other man did not attack back as much. Once, he tried to first hold back his attacks, then suddenly strike out!

The strike nearly cost him his life.

Before he could even reach the corner of the other man's sleeve, his opponent seemed to have foreseen his attack, and suddenly hit back with an abrupt increase in intensity. Had he not been prepared for it, Taylor would have died right then. However, a few punches barely grazed past his face, and the pain and shock from it was enough to make him sweat.

This strange young man was like a hedgehog, not to be touched. If you leave it alone, it would be no danger. If you accidentally touched it, the sharp spikes would definitely prick you.

Taylor had the feeling that this strange young man was a little off in the head, but he was also grateful of it. Had his opponent been normal, this fight would have turned out differently.

Now, his highest priority was to make the strange young man stop fighting. As he tried desperately to block his opponent's attacks, Taylor thought hard. He dared to speak up and leave an opening. It would be fatally dangerous to present an opening when fighting against someone so strong.

Suddenly, an idea came to him.

Hence, the audience watched something weird happened.

Both men began to slow down their movements. The afterimages disappeared. It became easier and easier to follow their every move.

Both men traded blows in slower and slower rhythm. In the next moment, it was like watching two elderlies trade punches.

This was puzzling to the audience. What kind of fight was this?

Taylor slowly relaxed himself, moving his around softly like waving off mosquitoes, afraid to trigger any crazy reaction from the young man again.

It worked, to his surprise. He made himself move even more slowly and non-threateningly, and his opponent's attacks immediately lessened drastically.

When the time came, Taylor stepped back abruptly like a startled rabbit. Just as he was out of range of the young man, the latter immediately froze on the spot.

Taylor stared at the rigidly standing young man before him, making sure that he would not fight back again, and heaved a long sigh of relief. He wiped off the cold sweat gathering on his forehead, saw the people who were watching them with astonishment, and blushed.

Fortunately, he was as skilled in combat as he was in formalities. He cleared his throat and announced, "Number 231 has passed the test. The next test is mech combat."

Good thing he was only in charge of hand-to-hand combat. If this was an actual fight ... Taylor shuddered at the thought.

Chapter 469: A Pilot with no Mech

Ye Chong eventually regained himself, though not really in his prime at the moment. There was a drought happening in his throat, an earthquake in his head. His focus was everywhere that he could only let off a bitter laugh.

How did I get to the field? What had just happened? Oh my Fal galaxy, is this the execution?

He somehow knew something but he could not recall.

"Number 231, Number 231, please proceed to the mech practical test area."

Number 231, that's me. But...

Ye Chong was confused as he looked at the strange and frightful gazes from the surrounding. He felt respect but it was a different kind of respect, not the one he got when he was with the Sangs, there was... something else?

"Mu, what just happened?" asked Ye Chong.

"Oh nothing," said Shang briefly. "You passed the test."

"Mhm," muttered Ye Chong as he forsook the question. Passing the test was part of his expectation, if that was the case, nothing should be wrong. Well, if Ye Chong could not pass the test, something must be wrong.

But then...

Ugh! For Fal's sake, my head is pounding again!

"Shang, my head," said Ye Chong firmly.

"It's typical. You just need a short rest. The pain would fade away a moment later. No aftereffect. Hahaha, Ye, relax~ It's not like you'll be on the wheelchair after this. No permanent damage I promise. Mhm, I indeed had improvised the training course. So, you are fine, just give your body some time..."

It did not sound all fine from Shang's tone. Ye Chong knew this partner notorious of the abominable conduct of his. He began wondering of what reason in Fal he even nodded to this training course in the first place. He missed Mu, at least Mu was constructively helpful, unlike somebody.

Nevertheless, despite the despicable tone, Shang was apparently speaking the truth, as Ye Chong could feel the pain lifting, although his focus was scattered as before, at least the cloud of agony was parting away in his head. He had always been highly confident of his will and tolerance towards pain, but such kind of headache was something too much to be part of the training. It was simply too dangerous, Ye Chong literally lost control of his body the moment he went out of focus.

So, he must never be back to that condition anymore.

And Ye Chong was pretty certain that Shang the genius did not foresee such horrible consequence of his "impeccable" training, or Shang would never allow Ye Chong to try it at the beginning.

Dragged the steps which felt boulders, Ye Chong could hear his mind giggling pitifully. It was as if his legs were made out of tentacles, he could not feel his thighs.

The bit of warmup did act like a form of basic recovery to his strength, which was relieving. Seriously he would not want to encounter anything at the moment, he would be passive at the situation if something happened.

The mech practical test area and the combat test area were in two different venues. Under the escort of the staff, he made his way to the mech test area. He can hear the passionate clinking of two machines brawling the moment he stepped into the zone.

It felt like not Brahm's day today, he thought he had met a weakling, during which he took the encounter roughly and did not watch his language. Who knows he was then assigned to escort Number 231, the "weakling" he presumed, to the mech brawling

zone. The dried tears over his face... he felt he would need to make a dive to a black hole at the moment, so he could just vanish for good. He was just an ordinary working staff after all and he had just messed with the wrong person.

Please, god, hear me out. Save me from this barbarian!

The way to the next area was torturing to him as he guided Ye Chong. He imagined his every step being the last on the way.

It felt heavenly the moment they arrived by the gate. "Thank you, sir, good bye!" And Ye Chong could no longer find Brahm in the next second.

"Ye, can you still fight?" asked Shang in concern.

"Uhh..." Ye Chong could feel his body recovering, he tried lifting his limbs, "No problem. I guess." Well, what defined as "problem" to Ye Chong was probably the problem of self-security, which technically translated as whether Ye Chong could guard himself from attacks. But he was still far from what he usually was. The fainting effect was something he still shunned.

He was not in his prime but he would not want to miss the only opportunity to make a fortune. He would kill for a piece of gold or two right now, as he had nothing in his purse, unless he decided to live the following days with nutrition capsules which tasted like dirt, or he would need real cash for real edibles. To leave Gray Valley, he also needed some information, what kept the broker talking was also the pile of real cold cash.

He gazed into the area as he observed the mech of the examiner, which was a traditional humanoid unit that wielded a sword and shield, nothing particularly strange, although he must admit that the examiner was a good pilot. The mech moved steadily as waving forcibly upon its opponent, threatening it certainly looked. The opposing pilot was tasting every slash and dash the examiner made, with no chance to fight back.

The tight chain of attacks was truly a puzzlement, especially when the examiner did not seem to be holding back even under a winning fight, at all.

He had experience, a strong mentality.

Judged Ye Chong in his mind.

There would be a handful of counters to take such type of pilot out. It should be cake-walk except Ye Chong was half-drunk at the moment. He was not sure how far he could fight on the field. Technically no miracle would happen when you fought a pilot like the examiner, he was not the kind who would make silly mistakes and giveaways. It was justifiable as Ye Chong observed no opening on the mech's defense.

At the spectators' area, the youngsters were watching the fight excitingly as their loud conversation was able to reach Ye Chong.

"That slash. Such an examiner. The opponent could not even fight back. Man, only if he's our instructor, we would not need to recruit these clowns, I mean, look at these people who came for the audition, not even 10 out of the hundreds could have a chance fighting the examiner." Said the black-haired boy.

"Him as our instructor? In your dreams! The examiner had just returned from the frontline, he kills the red-tailed beasts like slicing salmons. Did you know? He had killed over 10 of those horrors. So, don't even think about him instructing us. I had heard rumors that it took the authority countless attempts to even get him to the field. Rather than making such stupid daydream, why don't you think about the right class to attend later?"

The black-haired boy was aware of his sleep-talk so he just proceeded with the next topic, "So Xi Qing, which instructor's class are you joining?"

Xi Qing was a young man with golden hair and a rather mature feature for his age, though his expression seemed to retain the

youth's naivety, "Number 79 seems alright, I mean, his attacks are pretty outstanding. The only problem is whether if he would teach us seriously. Number 140... hmm, seems fine as well. White, how about you?"

The black-haired boy scratched his head, "I dunno. I still find the examiner the best."

"White, please." Shook Xi Qing, "Please have your attention back onto the participants, or you would be getting nothing in the end." Apparently, his advice had fallen upon deaf ears, White was having his eyes glued on the examiner still.

The Research Consortium had invested a lot in conducting the training class this time. Almost every city with fine infrastructure would have a training class itself, to which the consortium had provided bountiful rewards, like an advanced mech model for example. Anyone who could pass the training as well as the final examination would be rewarded handsomely.

The consortium had made consecutive efforts in promoting the class. They had slogans like, "Protect Yourself, Your Family, the Gray Valley" and produced heroic imagery of those pilots from the frontline, which had attracted enough attentions from the youngsters who wanted to join the tower defense of Gray Valley. Well the Research Consortium was influential to an extent indeed.

Among the youngsters, some did strive for protection, some however wanted the rewards and the pride. They were hitting the same path anyway - they would be giving their future to the war field.

"Yes? You don't have a mech?" The staff was perplexed by Ye Chong's statement.

"Mhm," muttered Ye Chong expressionlessly. He must be the pilot with no mech, since any mech of his collection was clearly a thing that would hoard attention. No Han Jia, the wings were large enough to be on the news. Skeleton Mechs? The whole galaxy

would know by then. Shang? Hah. He never appeared in Ye Chong's mind, not even once. He did have Valiance but that mech clearly defined itself from the outside with He Yue designs.

Hmm. It looks like he had to do something else.

Ye Chong was planning to leave.

I mean, a pilot with no mech? Even I myself find this ridiculous.

Chapter 470: Experiment Unit

"Hold it right there." A voice coming from a middle-aged plump man stopped Ye Chong, .

It was the top leader of the recruitment, Mr. Powell.

"What do you mean by that?" asked Powell, slightly displeased, when he apparently overheard the exchange between Number 231 and the staff, in which Number 231 was making his withdrawal from the recruitment drive.

If it was not of all timings, Powell just so happened to be walking by the test area while spotting that drowsy-looking boy making such comment he would not have run all his way to the boy. The boy had given him an epic fighting scene, nearly unforgettable in his mind, in which those afterimages danced to crosses as the sounds of raiding punches and kicks came raining like a storm. To be frank, Ye Chong had technically drained every last ounce of vitality of Taylor in that battle. So Taylor had to call it a day early, while requesting a new examiner to take over. Powell asked Taylor's opinion in the following moves and Taylor's replies were rather shocking. In his gasping words, Taylor illustrated his losing fight with this boy, on how he was just barely holding the giant's step which he would never have a chance to overcome the whole time.

Well, Powell had zero knowledge on combats but he felt he had gotten a fish on the hook, a large one too!

So Powell came all the way to check Number 231 out, but never he once expected that this Number 231 was going to leave for good. He got to do something to stop Number 231.

He listened to his staff to get a grip on the situation.

"He has no mech?" Powell flinched, that was never part of his prediction. A pilot with no mech? It sounded as far-fetched as

finding lights in black hole, or picking blues from the red-tailed beasts.

"Just a moment, young man." He would not let Ye Chong go just yet, "We do... have a few new units in the storage... Mhm, and by that I meant the close-combat model," he muttered, in suggestive tone to his staff.

"Yes sir but... the newest close-combat model contains only the experiment unit. Other than that we only had a few ranged models and a handful of abandoned units," replied the staff.

"An experiment unit?" Powell frowned.

"Yes sir, it's been there... for 5 to 6 years. Part of the failed experiment... I heard...," replied the staff sluggishly.

A product of a failed experiment? Powell finally understood the situation, of how this experiment unit ended up at his storage. The consortium liked experimenting modification and creation of all sorts of mech, which resulted in an enormous amount of experiment failures that ended up in the storage for the rest of all eternity.

"Well, are you willing to try? We could only offer you this mech." Said Powell, with little hesitation. That was the only thing he could say anyway, he had already lost faith in the situation, like which insane fellow would agree on piloting an failed produ-

"Okay." Ye Chong actually nodded at the offer.

Ye Chong felt it was at least a mech to work things on. It was not like he would be lose anything for piloting a mech with issues. So, why not?

"Okay?" Powell was confused, but later his eyes lustered with impression, "Okay. He'll lead you to the storage for the unit."

And there Ye Chong was, at the storage which looked spacious with only a few mechs standing by the piles of parts.

"If you are wondering about the space, well, the storage used to be full. Thanks to the war, the frontline demands all sorts of resources they could use, so most of the mechs in the storage had been sent there and we are only left with these few experiment units," said the staff, who led Ye Chong to the corner.

"And among them, this is the only close-combat model. You can try it now." The staff pointed at one mech covered in dust.

The mech had been spending the last 5 years with the dust. It was at a horrible location to be noticed and nobody liked to have their duty roster at the storage. When Ye Chong first saw the mech, he had only perceived a giant lump of dust. The working staff did not intend to even approach the dusty history an inch closer.

Ye Chong did not mind however, as he had spent probably his younger days at the filthiest, terrifying entire globe of trash before. The dusty history was just something normal.

He placed his hand over the mech, as if giving a new life, he forcibly swiped over the surface, the dust of the ancient danced in the air under the dim lamp.

The working staff had already retreated himself. He needed not to watch the young man, not like there was anything worth to keep an eye on in the storage.

The identity of the mech had finally been restored as the dust took off.

It was a mech with black and white stripes, yet without the usual metallic glow of the mechs out there. It was something different from what Ye Chong had encountered in the past. It exuded some kind of classiness not very attention-seeking to his sense. Most humanoid units would have a balanced proportion across the limbs and the main body. However this mech was having an inflated set of limbs, just like someone who overtrained the arms and legs and missing out the body. There was a tiny V-shaped shield on the arm and that was the only thing considerably as "weapon" on its entire

body.

Ye Chong, as a mech mod technician, was absolutely interested in freakish mechs like this.

He uncovered the cabin, in which he saw a triangular control panel - a design again different from what he used to see, likewise the button layout.

Ye Chong could not help but to boot the tutorial from the processor, so he could have an idea on how to move the limbs at least.

It took Ye Chong about an hour to have a rough idea on how to make the basic moves and also the reason why no one who would be interested of even touching this freak for the past 5 years.

It was a unique mech. Ye Chong had witnessed and also created countless strange mechs but this one was truly unique.

This mech was a close-combat model, precisely, a close-combat model on land*, purely for combats on land. Its lack of versatility had determined its doomed fate of being part of the storage since its creation.

There was only one thrusting engine for really basic aerial mobility. Again, it was a thrusting engine, so what it did best was probably only thrusting, it would not turn as flexibly as one imagined. So the aerial mobility was a jetpack mobility, which had determined the fact that it would never fight in the air since anyone even from the flea market knew an aerial battle required mobility and dexterity.

But well, this mech was not as useless in Ye Chong's eyes.

As long as it was deployed at the right place, it would go well.

Ye Chong thought to himself.

The secondary engines were installed on the limbs of the mech, which gave horrendous strength to those arms and legs.

Technically, Ye Chong imagined the mech to accelerate using the explosive sprinting ability. Those secondary engines were not for acceleration but a form of strength reinforcement. Unlike most mechs, this design was rather humane, to an extent that it also required a point to exert the momentum like how humans ran on ground for example, but that was a big no-no to most pilots who desired the elegant turns in the air.

So to accommodate such unique battle style, the designer also gave an overhaul to the control panel which turned out to be a horror to most pilots. It was so revolutionary that no pilot would stay upon opening the cabin.

That was why, the mech had been living with the dirt, at the darkest corner of the storage.

Nevertheless, Ye Chong saw that outstanding luster in this mech. The designer must be a great Maverick, Ye Chong could see this from the programming of the processor itself, especially when calculating the gravitational force balancing, in which Ye Chong believed to be the best he had seen so far. Generally, the processor would calculate the center of gravity of the mech on every action while producing the appropriate recalibration coping with the changes. This mech provided the most motion stability among all units Ye Chong had deployed so far.

The strength of the limbs was a plus when engaging a close-combat, which transformed the mech into a total nightmare since it could just strike like Hercules.

And Ye Chong then found a large inventory of gadgets in the storing unit of the mech. Apparently, to maintain its mobility on ground, the mech was not armed with heavy weaponry. Instead it went with the gadgets.

There were parrying spears, laser swords, shurikens, blade underfoot, arm guard, springing knife on knees, elbow thrust...

This mech was literally a humanoid weaponry. Ye Chong was

amazed by the design, as all these gadgets were hidden perfectly across the entire body. The designer was a genius, or probably a lunatic, a super lunatic!

The pilot of this mech had to have a certain degree of foundation on martial arts, especially the appropriate method to exert strength so one could maximize the mech's speed on foot. It sounded like Ye Chong, who was blessed with September Lan's techniques and martial arts experience. To be honest, the mech looked like a larger version of the Guardian.

Well, the only problem left would be this odd control panel.

He had grown onto the traditional designs and it would take a considerable amount of time before he got familiar on this bizarre interface. And it would be horrible if he pressed the wrong button when he thought he knew what he was doing in combat.

Habit was something that killed adaptability and probably himself!

Ye Chong, who was left with no option, eventually started practicing on this mech. At least he was not resistant to the bizarreness of the mech since he had been piloting all kinds of mechs over the years.

The storage was shaking as there was a bulky mech jumping and skipping, crashing into racks around, like a newborn to his steps.

Chapter 471: A Clumsy Debut

It was far-fetched even for the greatest pilot to familiarize himself with a new mech within a few hours, especially when the mech was so "outstanding" itself. If one was working on a standard model, one could at least make the necessary dodges and slashes during a simple audition like this, but Ye Chong was not with the norms it seemed.

The mech not only had a non-mainstream battle style but also a funny interface. It took Ye Chong 5 hours to pass the tutorial - how to move the mech and not look like someone who graduated from pilot school yesterday.

Ye Chong was aware of his limitation yet he still worked hard in mastering the controls. Well, he had long discarded the thoughts of getting through the recruitment, knowing the standard of this examiner who swung steadily like a true warrior on a war field, unlike Ye Chong who was piloted an anomaly while being in a deviated health condition. Everything felt unrealistic but so relieving too...

Ye Chong, without being burdened by the obliged victory, was having fun fiddling the controls of his new toy. Throughout the curious learning on the new mech, he started to feel its potential, a great potential too. To be honest, he had a stunning collection of mechs, which simply deploying them would grab unwanted attention, so this new mech, well, would be a pretty good alternative when he needed some mechanical help. He had made up his mind, that he would be "borrowing" this mech from the storage after the recruitment drive ended.

It should not be hard and nobody would actually cared he reckoned, since there was nothing much in the storeroom, there was no guard too and Shang approved this plan.

When Ye Chong was indulged in something, he would lose the

sense of time. He wondered if it was because of the tranquility he got when he studied something or the validity of Shang's statement that he would recover in no time, as he was truly recovering rapidly and he had felt normal at the moment.

"Number 231. Please, proceed to the test area." It was till the working staff called him from outside the storage when he realized the hours passed.

5 hours had lapsed and he only felt the hunger as he smelled the scrumptious food on the table aside. Without hesitation he ran towards the table gracelessly and the working staff was rolling his eyes in the dark, wondering why Mr. Powell the leader was giving so much attention on this boy. The disdain in his eyes intensified when he saw Ye Chong gargling and crunching like a caveman.

After Ye Chong had filled himself, he finally started checking out the running examination.

It was another examiner, whose mech was much advanced model than the previous, Ye Chong could tell from the enhancement in speed and dexterity. The examiner was more skillful as well, since he was able to demonstrate more flashy moves which were challenging to execute consecutively, consisting of epic turns and dodges. The youngsters were hurrahing.

The mech was also a humanoid mech armed with a sword like the examiner before, but looking way cooler with a purple metallic edge on its armor and a golden glow from its laser blade.

As Ye Chong observed, he could not help but to shake his head. Those moves were surely flashier than the examiner before but they only could serve decorative, staging purpose. This examiner was weaker as he had actual openings between each of his moves. It was merely because the moves were chained so rapidly that there seemed to be any opportunity to attack, unlike the examiner before who had an impeccable defense on his every move.

Xi Qing was also shaking his head.

"Xi Qing, what's wrong?" asked White.

"Nothing. I just find this examiner much weaker than the last. I just afraid that he would affect the standard of our new instructors."

"What? Xi Qing, how so? Why would you feel that he's bad? I think he's pretty good, I mean, look at his steps, they look so cool! His turns are unpredictable too. How I wish I could have his standard one day...", said White.

Xi Qing was silent since then, knowing that White was the typical deaf ears to his words so he just kept his focus at the field. He was worried as none of the examiners was satisfying to his eyes thus far.

It was then the candidate was struck down by the examiner's flashy side kick. Announcing the candidate's defeat, the youngsters were totally excited as a fiasco could be seen at the spectators' area. Xi Qing had no comment on this, he just crossed this candidate out on his handbook.

"Number 231, Number 231, please proceed to the test ground."

Xi Qing then wrote "231" on his handbook and just watched.

Powell was on the top of the area, having the best view of the fight.

"Finally... 231 is on..." Muttered he as he reminisced the few epic scenes conducted by this mysterious boy. He was enthralled. "But well..." He went cold quickly, as he remembered that the boy was merely a pilot with no mech. "How much can I expect from a pilot with no mech?" He still retained a little expectation on this boy nevertheless.

"Hahaha!!"

"Look at that!"

"What is that... thing..."

The moment Ye Chong entered the field in the experiment unit, people were laughing uncontrollably. The mech did look awkward... as if some deformed baby. It took a few minutes for the mech to complete its debut as unlike most mechs, this mech just dawdled its way to the center.

"What?" Powell could not believe his eyes, never once he imagined the experiment unit being such a failure. He would never let Number 231 pilot it if he did.

Upon seeing the disproportionally designed machine, Xi Qing shook his head again, the tip of his pen was going to make the first slash of the cruel cross, but it stopped. "On second thought..." Xi Qing decided to watch the fight first.

In the midst of laughter, there was a group of people watching Number 231's entry in dead silence. They were the following candidates and had witnessed Number 231's performance before.

They were convinced by Number 231's strength and surely one with such strength would possess a mech befitting to his capabilities. They would not look down upon the mech because of its appearance.

They were anticipating more surprises from Number 231.

Ye Chong was calm, as he seemed to have recovered to his prime.

If he were to fight against the examiner before, he doubted he would stand a chance. But he was going to fight a different examiner and against this examiner, he felt he had a better chance.

The examiner was none other than a piece of vase, one with only the outside. That was Ye Chong's comment as he perceived the showy tendency of this examiner. He was not sure if the flaunting habit came from the examiner himself or it was a side effect of the screams by the spectators. Ye Chong felt everything was unnecessary and pointless. It was a poor habit that he could utilize to maximize his likelihood to victory!

Moreover, this examiner seemed to fancy turns a lot. Making turns was the bread and butter of Ye Chong's battle after conducting the intensive training course designed by Mu. He had a deeper understanding of turn-leaping during his adventure and he believed the experience would be helpful in this fight.

Ye Chong was looking still above the triangular control panel, as the mech clumsily sank in the ground.

"Start!"

The opposing mech launched itself towards Ye Chong. The pilot seemingly wanted a quick fight, which indirectly could be translated as the pilot did not see Number 231 a worthy opponent in his eyes.

Ye Chong was not reacting towards the examiner's arrogance.

Ye Chong's mind captured a few spots. The left rib, the right knee! If he was piloting Han Jia, he was confident to attack any of those critical points within the few seconds. Then it would indeed be a quick fight, as the examiner wished, just the outcome would be different to what he presumed.

Too bad Ye Chong was not piloting Han Jia.

Ye Chong eventually had to give up the one golden opportunity to attack since he was sitting in a piece of failed experiment unit.

His hands foreignly inputted a few commands, which prompted the mech to make a heavy stomp and a guard with its arms.

Xi Qing shook his head helplessly as he found Number 231's moves to be rather jarring.

Certainly the candidates were feeling the same too. They were surprised.

"When did they allow greenhorns to join the consortium?"

"Talking about standards..."

Ye Chong was on his guard. A guarding mech would have a

smaller and manageable movements, while giving higher demand towards prediction on the foe's moves. Well that was not challenging to Ye Chong, at all.

He had a plan in his mind. The experiment mech curled itself up, waiting for the attack!

Chapter 472: Fissure Strangle

"Hahah ..."

"Haha ... Oh my God ... It's too much ... Ohh ... No no no ... My stomach hurts ... Hahaha ..."

The entire audience in the mech combat test arena was roaring with laughter. The young people on the stage laughed even more tickled, doubling over with laughter. Even Brahm could not help but smiled.

It was truly a very amusing spectacle. The examiner circled around the strange looking mech while attacking, but the metal stump could always avoid the attacks with all kinds of weird movements. It was not just weird to watch, for the mech itself looked like an oddball, so the end result was comedic instead.

The odd mech suddenly put its left hand and feet to the ground, attempting to do a side flip and avoid the examiner's attack. The thickset metal limbs of the metal stump flipped unceremoniously to the side, and crashed into the ground during its unsteady maneuver. The huge fellow crashed down loudly like a building, kicking up dust that covered the examiner's mech in a layer of dirt.

This invited even more laughter from the floor. The youngsters who were bending over themselves, catching a breath, now laughed again, but their faces showed the pain they were now experiencing in their abdomen.

Inside the pilot cabin, Ye Chong felt helpless. He had wanted to enter a command to do a horizontal step, but the mech had done a horizontal flip instead. Surprised by the mistake, Ye Chong keyed in another erroneous command, and the mech went off balance and crashed into the ground.

Ye Chong was already used to making a series of mistake in a row by now. There was nothing he could do about it. The controls were

placed differently than he was used to, and that was a very fatal weakness in combat.

The only reason he had not lost yet was his ability to read his opponent's intentions and react accordingly. Of course, there was also a bit of luck involved. Else, he would have lost a long time ago.

Even so, he was now playing a completely passive role.

The examiner was also puzzled and annoyed. No matter how he looked at it, he had the advantage, while the d*mned Number 231 could not even afford to attack him. However, the clumsy metal stump was incredibly lucky, avoiding all his attacks in ridiculously humiliating ways every single time. This annoyed him to no end.

However, he had decided to end this fight with a killer move!

"Humph, let's see if you'll avoid this!" The examiner thought to himself, his eyes glaring inside the pilot cabin. He was now positively furious.

The examiner's hands flew across his controls, entering the necessary commands. His mech retreated unexpectedly, widening the distance between him and Ye Chong.

Inside the pilot cabin, Ye Chong's face remain expressionless, but the deep calm in his eyes was tinged with worry.

"So? How's the test going?" A casual voice asked from behind Brahm.

Brahm turned over to see a middle-aged man, his upper half body naked, walking towards him. He slung a towel over his shoulder, and his muscles glistened with undried sweat.

Brahm considered for a moment and replied, "It's getting interesting."

The middle-aged man sat down heavily beside Brahm, looking surprised. "If even you think it's interesting, it must be very much indeed."

"Well, see for yourself." Brahm nodded towards the test arena below.

"Hehe, I will," the other man said without meaning it as he dried himself with his towel.

Brahm turned his attention from the fight to the man sitting beside him, and spoke earnestly, "Tong, thank you for this." The man called Tong was the examiner who piloted the mech with the shield and sword. He was sent here on a mission, and since Brahm received orders to help with the instructor's hiring process, he had volunteered for to be a guest examiner.

Tong waved off his words. "It's no big deal, don't worry about it. I haven't had a chance to fight since coming back from the front line. It was enjoyable to say the least."

"How's the situation at the front line? You know that the news we get here is mixed in with gossip and rumors, it's hard to figure out what's really going on." Brahm sat up straight and looked at Tong.

Tong shook his head. "We're not doing so well. So far, we're in a stalemate. People die at the front line everyday. We know too little about those creature." He paused, looked around them for eavesdroppers, then leaned closer to Brahm and said in a low voice, "Not long ago, Arwa's scouts found a very strong red-tailed beast nearby, right at the edge of the asteroid zone. Only three out of 30 in the scouting squad came back alive."

"What?" Brahm turned pale, but quickly composed himself. He looked around to see if anyone noticed, then leaned towards Tong and spoke shakily, "What you're saying is ..."

The two of them exchange a long lok. Tong nodded solemnly and said, "Yes. The higher-ups are wondering if there are other red-tailed beasts that have already infiltrated Gray Valley."

Brahm's face was drained of blood. He was a non-combatant still,

having never been on the battlefield, and he was shocked by the news. Tong patted Brahm lightly by the shoulder to soothe him, and said, "Don't worry too much about it. Even if they're here, the soldiers will fight them first." He added, "Don't tell anyone about this. It's classified military information, hehe." However, from the way he told it, it did look like he cared much for so-called classified information.

Suddenly, the spectators in the arena roared in excitement, attracting their attention.

Two light yellow trails dissolved like crystals into the air.

At the beginning of these two trails were the examiner's shining laser katars that he held in his hands.

The examiner sat in his pilot cabin, his eyes full of disbelief.

He ... He missed!

How was that possible? That was his first thought.

He had used a very difficult technique just now, but also a very aggressive one. This was a move that he had practised for a long time, but until now, he could rarely execute the move successfully, so he never used it in actual combat. Now, since his opponent was not dangerous at all, and the fight was dragging on, he decided on impulse to try the technique.

This time, he miraculously executed the entire move, and that made him so very happy.

He knew that, with this difficult move executed, his opponent would surely fall, either injured or dead. That was out of his control.

However ... He missed!

What happened? His excitement from executing the attack move completely was immediately doused with cold water. He had anticipated victory, but missed at the very last moment. It drove

him mad! It all happened too quickly that he could not figure out what went wrong.

Ye Chong panted heavily. That was a very dangerous moment that strained him to the extreme. However, he keyed in the commands on the controls quickly, without delay.

From the moment his opponent stepped back, Ye Chong knew what trouble he was about to face.

Fissure Strangle!

This technique was quite famous, though Ye Chong thought it was impractical. However, he must admit that once the move was executed, it would be very damaging to the enemy.

If he had Han Jia, this Fissure Strangle would be child's play to counter. Before his opponent could finish the preparatory moves, Ye Chong would have ample time to thoroughly conceal his mech.

However, he did not have Han Jia, but an experimental mech! Ye Chong quickly gave up on attacking, and decided to block and avoid instead. Ye Chong's quick assessment saved him. He had immediately identified the three locations that his opponent would hit. This gave him 1.5 seconds to act on it.

However, it was in this 1.5 seconds that Ye Chong keyed in the commands on his triangular controls panel that he was unfamiliar with. During the process, Ye Chong even made a mistake, but this was quickly corrected with his extraordinary hand speed. By the time he corrected his mistake, the laser katars were already before him.

Ye Chong's mech bent its left leg and lunged its right leg backwards for support. Its body arched slightly. The left arm held up its V-shaped shield to the front, and the right arm reached down to the ground for support. The mech went into this strange stance.

Wham!

The first to be destroyed was the V-shaped shield. It was smashed to pieces by direct impact from the attack. However, the opponent's movement was halted, and that was Ye Chong was waiting for.

With the right arm and both legs against the ground, Ye Chong's mech pushed forward! The mech's engines were all installed at the limbs to increase their power. Hence, the combined power of all three engines boosted the mech's speed and power tremendously!

Ye Chong's mech was like a spring compressed to its limit, then released.

Bang!

A deep buzzing sound of metal against metal hurt the ears of the audience.

Ye Chong's mech had crashed straight into the examiner's mech. Since the attack was upwards, the examiner's mech flew back in the opposite direction at an even higher speed.

Everyone who watched this could not help but think of an ancient sport - billiards! Weren't these two mechs just like two billiard balls colliding?

The entire arena was shocked into silence for a good 10 seconds. Then, a thunderous roar of applause came from the stage. Everyone was won over by the battle.

The two mechs faced each other once again. The examiner's mech still looked untouched, but Number 231's mech had only half of its shield on its left arm. Everyone knew that Number 231 could no longer rely on the shield for cover. It would lose, sooner or later.

Even so, the audience cheered loudly for for the wonderful performance by the unwieldy looking mech just now.

Chapter 473: Making an Exception

To the audience, Ye Chong's loss was inevitable. However, Ye Chong himself did not think so. In fact, he believed that victory was close at hand. Even if his opponent tried Fissure Strangle on him again, he would be able to block without his shield. Perhaps it was due to the fighting moves, he no longer felt too tired anymore. Of course, he still stuck to being passive, waiting for his opponent's next move.

Tong took a look at the arena, surprised. "So you really do have a few capable subordinates here. This guy can use Fissure Strangle, must be a capable man. Hmm, that candidate is also doing very well, blocking that Fissure Strangle attack. You should make an exception and hire him. If the fight goes on, he could get hurt."

"Alright." Brahm nodded. He activated his comms and quietly spoke orders. Right now, his mind was mostly occupied with the shocking news that his friend brought to him, and his attention on Number 231 was temporarily redirected.

If Tong knew that Ye Chong was actually using a mech that he had only began to use just hours ago, he would have taken back his words. Brahm was a non-combatant, and did not realize the difference it would make. However, since Tong said the candidate was acceptable, he must be worth recruiting.

Suddenly, Tong's comms device rang. He looked surprised, and said, "Something's come up, I'll be leaving." He began to move in haste.

Brahm looked at Tong's retreating silhouette for a moment before yelling, "Tong, stay safe!"

Brahm, who was practically running towards the exit, waved his hand in acknowledgement without looking back.

As Ye Chong stood prepared for the next attack, he received a

notice that he was recruited, and that came as a bit of a surprise. Of course, his examiner was equally surprised. He did not understand why Number 231 was hired. To him, Number 231 was not up to standard at all. More infuriating was the fact that Number 231 had made him look so humiliating! He was already planning to trash Number 231 on the arena, but now it was all over. He was dissatisfied with how it turned out!

However, he was also powerless against it. He knew that Brahm was still the person who had the power to make the final decision.

The decision left all the other candidates in an uproar.

How could blocking a Fissure Strangle attack once qualify a person to be accepted? That was too bizarre! The candidates outside the arena discussed the outcome with dissatisfaction. In fact, most of the people believed that the only reason Number 231 managed to block the examiner's Fissure Strangle attack was due to luck. Can luck be the reason someone was hired? No one could understand the final decision of the hiring board.

White stared at the arena in disbelief, then shouted angrily, "F*cking cheat? He's hired? How can someone like that be hired? Are they crazy? Xi Qing, if someone like that is hired, no one will want to train under him. Has the hiring board turned scatterbrained?"

Xi Wing looked to the arena and muttered, "It's hard to say, White!"

White turned over and looked at Qi Xing like the man was an alien. "Xi Qing, since when are you brain damaged as well?"

However, most of the candidates were more well behaved than the youngsters who were from the stage above. They were mostly older, and cared more about themselves. It did not matter if another extra person was hired. Their salary would not be reduced just because they have an idiot as a coworker.

A few of the candidates who had passed the test eyed the dumb looking mech, musing to themselves.

Ye Chong exited the arena gracefully, ignoring all the stares he was receiving.

The examiner could not stand seeing his opponent being so at ease and slammed angrily on his controls.

Beep beep beep! An alarm sounded. The examiner panicked. Did he just break his controls console? He quickly ran a self assessment, but could see nothing wrong. The frantic alarm made him nervous. Soon, his forehead was covered in sweat.

Hidden below the left side of the chest of his mech was a deep impression, an injury that was hard to notice. From the fresh wound, it was easy to discern that it was due to a strong impact. The position coincided with an important photon circuit node. The armor was bent inwards and blocked the photon circuits, which caused the alarm to sound.

That damage was caused by the elbow edge of Ye Chong's mech. The mech's elbow had a protrusion that was designed to be concealed when the arm hung down naturally. Only when the mech bent its arm would the weapon reveal itself menacingly. The elbow protrusion was made of very strong alloy, and while it was not exactly sharp, its power was amplified by the strength of the mech's arms.

When blocking the Fissure Strangle attack, Ye Chong had sneaked in a hit on his opponent. Ye Chong had never seen the examiner's mech before, but he could still guess at its internal structure, and had chosen to hit that exact spot.

Since the photon circuits were damaged, it would be immediately noticeable after the attack. Only after some time would his opponent's mech begin to show difficulty in movement, and maybe even become impossible to operate. That would be his chance to strike back!

However, Ye Chong found himself accepted by the hiring board before his nifty trick had borne fruit.

The candidates who were still waiting for their turn in the arena looked at the examiner's mech curiously, for it had not moved since the battle was declared over, and the examiner had not asked for the next candidate to step inside.

The examiner was now sweating profusely. He was now frustrated at himself for not keeping calm earlier! Now that he had damaged his own mech, the upcoming tests will have to be carried out by his colleague. On the other hand, he was devastated that his beloved mech was not responding to his commands anymore.

He did not relate this damage with Number 231 at all.

The truth was, the attack was over too quickly, and Ye Chong had attacked discreetly, such that no one, including the examiner, noticed anything amiss.

It was when the mech was moved to the maintenance workshop that the damage was discovered. However, the examiner still did not think that it was caused by that infuriating Number 231.

It was the last day of the tests, and there were only about seven or eight candidates after Ye Chong. Soon, the tests were completed. There were 25 who passed the tests, and Ye Chong was ranked the last.

Ye Chong did not mind the ranking. When he received part of his upfront salary, he finally heaved a sigh in relief. Of course, there were other benefits. The affluent Research Consortium had offered generous remunerations to attract more capable people from the public. Aside from the huge upfront payment, there were other benefits, such as receiving their very own advanced level mechs. These mechs were not available in the market, and produced by the Consortium itself. Most candidates were enticed by the advanced mechs.

Of course, all candidates would have to successfully complete their training before receiving these benefits.

Ye Chong's mech, the so-called failed experiment, was not sought by other people, so he became its owner in the end.

The Research Consortium provided luxurious accommodation for all of them. Everyone had their own rooms, which were spacious and full of amenities, and designed to look high tech. The building also had its own mech training ground and gymnasium.

After Shang verified that the room clear of surveillance, Ye Chong felt relieved.

"Shang, are you still unable to hack into the virtual world?" Ye Chong laid on the bed and asked out loud. He was beyond exhausted at this point. Everything that happened today had drained him mentally in unprecedented proportions, and he was now dead tired.

Shang replied helplessly, "I'm not done with decoding their calculations yet, so for the moment, I can't get in." Without access to the virtual world, Shang could not do anything, and the mech was very, very annoyed about it.

"I see," Ye Chong replied almost in reflex. He felt sleep overcome him, and he was soon gone to the world.

When Ye Chong woke up, it was in the dead of night. After resting, much of his physical and mental stamina had recovered. He greeted Shang and ordered a meal. Then, Ye Chong activated the photon processor in his room and put on his hyperlink helmet.

Shang may not be able to enter the virtual world, but he could.

Ye Chong wondered about in the virtual world. It was already very late into the night, but there were still many people in the virtual world. The virtual world here was unlike the virtual world in the Five Galaxies, but Ye Chong was in no mood to explore. He focused on finding the information he needed.

Once he arrived at an info center, he would be able to make inquiries. Most of it would be publicly available, but since it was free of charge, it was only to be expected.

Ye Chong needed a microphoton repair device to mend the small cracks that were spread across Han Jia's armor.

Staying in this unfamiliar territory without Han Jia, would leave him in a vulnerable position.

After about half an hour, Ye Chong found what he was looking for.

The microphoton repair device was a high precision device. Only larger research institutions or universities would have them, like the Research Consortium and the infamous Hepburn-Ladee University. On Henna, only the mech laboratory in Centuria University had them.

"Centuria University," Ye Chong muttered to himself. He quickly looked up its location. As the largest education institution on Planet Henna, Centuria University was easy to find. He could even look up the general layout of the university.

Chapter 474: Bad Omen

It was already late at night, but the city was still glowing with life. Crysound City was only an average mid-sized city in Gray Valley that did not stand out in any way. However, due to its location near the edge of Gray Valley, close to the Calamitous Asteroid Belt, it became a resupply station for people before entering the asteroid region. Mech squads and individual mech pilots would frequently enter Gray Valley through this city, and it was this influx of outsiders that drove the local economy.

Nonetheless, the recent appearance of the red-tailed beasts had ignited an all out war. Since Plant Henna was close to the front line, people began to move inwards to the inner parts of Gray Valley. The local economy was severely affected. Even so, Ye Chong still got to see the city illuminated in all its glory.

Centuria University was not far from where Ye Chong was. It was about 30 kilometers away, in fact. He chose to get there on foot to avoid being noticed. Before setting out, he also changed his clothes as Shang advised. For this, he had even made a trip to the nearby store.

Currently, Shang behaved in an honest and helpful manner, perhaps contemplative of his earlier mistake. The clothing that he chose was very common looking, but its black and gray colors made it well suited or blended in the dark at night.

30 kilometers was not too long of a distance for Ye Chong. After about 40 minutes, he arrived at the perimeter fencing of Centuria University. Ye Chong found out from the virtual world that Centuria University had stopped all classes due to the war. The spacious university grounds were now empty, and all of its buildings were closed down.

Ye Chong headed towards the mech experiment laboratory, following the route he had memorized beforehand.

The university was pitch black. Ye Chong moved quietly like a fox, slipping past the university buildings.

"Mech Experiment Laboratory" - the gold embossing stood out in the night, and Ye Chong breathed a sigh of relief as he saw them. However, his troubles were not yet over, such as the current issue of entering the lab. If it was before, he would have just withdrew Han Jia and force his way through the door. Now, however, he would not.

Since Henna was close to the front line, local security would be on high alert. It was only reasonable for a huge university's mech experiment laboratory to be guarded by security. If he triggered the alarm, the local military force, nervous from the war at hand, would definitely finish him off without hesitation. More importantly, the microphoton repair device was too large to move. The best option he had was to repair Han Jia right there without attracting any attention.

The problem now was, how could he enter the lab without triggering the alarm?

Ye Chong asked, "Shang, got any ideas?"

"Hacking in is impossible. The calculations used here are completely different from what I know of. Besides, once I enter the virtual world, I'll be discovered. Hmm, if that's the case, let me think ..." Shang was also vexed by their predicament.

Ye Chong waited quietly for Shang's answer. Mu was the expert in this field, and Shang was not so bad himself; Ye Chong himself, however, was absolutely clueless about it.

"Hmm, perhaps we can cut off its energy supply, shut down the entire security system, then we can force our way in." Shang provided his opinion after a long moment of consideration.

"Alright! Let's do that," Ye Chong said decisively.

"Ye, just 500 meters opposite, beneath the seventh streetlamp,

there's a underground photon node. Let's check it out," Shang provided more concrete instructions.

With Shang's directions, Ye Chong went to the seventh streetlamp. Just beside the base of the streetlamp was a light green colored manhole cover, measuring about 5 meters across. The cover was made of some kind of compound material.

The cover was firmly in place, but since there were no alarms set for it, Ye Chong forced it open. Beneath the cover was a dark hole. A flight of stairs ran down along one side of the inner wall, going downwards. Ye Chong went down the hole without delay, and put the cover back in its place on his way down.

He switched on the comms device on his arm. The holographic projection that came from it helped light his way in here.

"Hmm, this must be the photon node for the surrounding buildings," Shang offered unsure. He was no longer as powerful as he wished to be without access to the virtual world. Now, he could rely on the knowledge in his memory archive to assess his surroundings.

Six three-meter all metal cabinets were arranged side to side to form a hexagon, and Ye Chong was now in the middle of them all. All six cabinets were locked.

"Ye, try and open the one in front of you," Shang suggested after some thought.

The strong alloy lock was broken easily. Ye Chong threw it to the floor and opened the cabinet, and he was instantly baffled by what was inside. "What next?"

Right before his eyes were numerous small lights blinking irregularly like the stars in the night sky. They looked complicated and intricate, and grandly stretched out like the sea.

Ye Chong did not expect to see such a complicated structure in the inconspicuous cabinet. Since he was rarely involved in this

area of expertise, he did not know what to do with them.

Shang replied swiftly, "That's the one. Let me look at its internal structure." He added in a mutter, "This kind of technical work should be done by that stiff guy, Mu. Now I'm the one who's gonna lower myself to this level, what a waste of talent! Such is life ..." He seemed to be struck by the oddities of life.

Despite his complaining, Shang made short work of the photon node.

"Ye, find the 316th row, the 705th light pin from the left. Break that light pin and you're ready to go," Shang said confidently.

The 316th row, 705th light pin from the left. Ye Chong could feel his eyes going blind. The light pins were so tiny and numerous, and they were all blinking to their own rhythm. However, since Shang had came up with a solution, Ye Chong could only start counting.

"Ye, Ye, you missed one."

"Ye, that's the wrong row."

"Err, Ye, are you so degenerated inside that you can't even do simple algebra?"

Shang's incessant and annoying blabberings bombarded Ye Chong. This was a difficult task, and those blinking lights made his head hurt. With Shang's constant interruption, even Ye Chong's legendary patience was challenged.

"Shang, please stop talking to me. I need silence, silence!" Ye Chong could not help but emphasized the word "silence".

"Alright alright! I'll be quiet." Shang saw that he was in no good mood, and quickly turned obedient.

Without Shang's interruption, Ye Chong quickly located the light pin. Unlike finding the pin, destroying was a piece of cake. It was only then that Ye Chong realized, he should have just destroyed all

the light pins. That would have been way faster and easier. "Looks like I'm still not calm enough," Ye Chong noted to himself.

No matter. Now that they were finished with this, they were already halfway there. The only thing he needed to do now was to force his way into the lab and find the microphoton repair device.

Ye Chong was about to lift the manhole cover when Shang whispered in warning, "Ye, don't go out, something's happening!"

Ye Chong's heart sank. He quickly stopped moving. Shang was usually a joker, but he would also be serious in the face of danger. Right now, he recognized the seriousness in his voice.

"There are 12 mechs and five red-tailed beasts. There are red-tailed beasts here? Strange!" Shang muttered to himself.

Red-tailed beasts. Ye Chong was shocked. How could there be red-tailed beasts here? When Ye Chong made his inquiry about the microphoton repair device, he also did some research on Gray Valley's current affairs. There were a lot of information on this in the virtual world, and it was also the hottest topic. After spending some time digesting those information, Ye Chong finally had a better grasp of the situation in Gray Valley.

The front line and the rear - these were two keywords that kept popping up. War in the front line was going on strongly, but the rear was very stable. Every source of information seemed to collaborate on this fact.

Planet Henna was at the rear, why would there be any red-tailed beasts here? Could it be ... Ye Chong quickly sensed the implications. Either the front line was breached, or the red-tailed beasts were beginning to attack from the rear. Whichever the case, the red-tailed beasts were here now, and this meant that the situation in the rear was about to change drastically. Perhaps, the rear would no longer be safe anymore.

Ye Chong frowned in thought. He was not concerned about the

overall situation, but if the rear was getting dangerous, then he would also be in trouble. Without anyone else with him, his power was limited, and barely enough to tip the scales of battle in this war. More importantly, once the peace was disturbed, people would begin to grow nervous, and public safety would be compromised. If the red-tailed beasts started appearing in large numbers at the rear, the situation would be even more grim. Perhaps the entire Gray Valley would descend into chaos.

"Hmm, they've started fighting each other," Shang reported excitedly. "Hmmm, good skills there, sigh, too bad that move was not chosen well. Ye, these guys are not as good as you. Huh, strange, this red-tailed beast looks strong," Shang commented sporadically as he enjoyed the show.

Ye Chong did not have Mu/Shang's holographic scanning system, and could not see what was happening outside. However, he could hear faint sounds of fighting through the cover above him. Soon, the battle grew more heated, and the faint sounds grew clearer and more frequent.

Ye Chong quietly climbed to the manhole cover and lifted it a little. The battle outside unfolded before his eyes.

Chapter 475: Three Mechs

It's the red-tailed beasts!

There were 12 mechs, all different looking, fighting intensely against five red-tailed beasts. Bang bang bang! The sound of collisions never stopped. Whenever one of them crashed into the ground, it was enough to make the earth shake.

The red-tailed beasts were about the same size as the mechs, but they move more flexibly. Despite being outnumbered, they did not seem to be fighting at a disadvantage. The five red-tailed beasts evasively moved from building to building. The 12 mechs could not surround the creatures, and could only run around to keep them in sight.

Crash! Rumble! Dust was flying everywhere, as neither the red-tailed beasts nor the 12 mechs were particularly careful moving around the buildings. The red-tailed beasts were tough creatures, and the 12 mechs were also very strong. They chased each other around, destroying the buildings in their wake. Soon, all that was left was rubble.

Bong! There was a loud but dull sound. A strong wave of dust then hit Ye Chong in the face. Ye Chong instinctively shut his eyes, but he knew he was in trouble. That sound was very close to where he was. Could it be ...

When Ye Chong regained his sight, his heart turned cold.

The mech laboratory was reduced to rubble. Everywhere was filled with debris, and dust was blown away from the center that was originally the lab. A red-tailed beast emerged from the dust and debris, hurling itself onto one of the mechs in the air!

"D*mn!"

Ye Chong and Shang cursed almost in sync.

Ye Chong pushed the cover away and came out. He bent over,

taking cover behind the dust, and quickly entered the now defunct mech laboratory.

Looking at the microphoton repair device on the ground, or what's left of it, Ye Chong knew that his plan had gone to waste.

He studied his immediate surroundings. Both sides were deep in the fight. The 12 mechs were strong. Perhaps they were from some kind of elite squad. Each of them could take a red-tailed beast head on by themselves.

Suddenly, Ye Chong saw one of the mechs, one in red and black, with a shield and sword as its weapon, was pinned down by a red-tailed beast. Upon closer inspection, Ye Chong recognized the pilot - it was the examiner who used an average shield-sword mech earlier that day. These two mechs were very different, as this shield-sword mech was much more advanced than the average one he saw earlier. The maroon red alloy sword looked like it was covered with blood, and the huge shield was as dark as night. Together, they made the mech look like a killer from Hell.

It was not hard for Ye Chong to recognize the similar ways these two mechs moved.

However, he was rarely over curious, and without a mech to protect himself, the current situation was dangerous for him. Since the microphoton repair device was destroyed, he should leave as soon as possible.

Ye Chong was about to leave this dangerous place when Shang suddenly spoke up, "Ye, careful, mechs incoming!"

Ye Chong quickly hid behind one of the damaged walls. Given the complicated terrain, it would be difficult to notice him, even with holographic scanning.

Almost as soon as Shang finished his sentence, three black dots appeared in the sky. They came swiftly, and Ye Chong watched them grew larger and larger. There were three golden mechs, and

they were fast! Ye Chong was surprised. However, when the three golden mechs finally landed, he felt a sense of familiarity.

Where had he seen them before?

Ye Chong recalled then of the 10 golden mechs he had seen at the abandoned factory, before he entered Crysound City. No wonder they looked familiar. He had seen them before. These golden mechs had left a deep impression in Ye Chong. They could fly up to Mach 16 within the atmosphere. Their speed was truly astonishing!

Ye Chong doubt he could make a mech that could fly so fast himself if he had not been using skeleton material to his advantage,.

The three golden mechs join the fight without delay.

The three golden mechs looked different from one another. One of them had a typical sword and shield combination; one had twin swords; the last one preferred to fight at very close range, using small weapons that looked like parrying daggers.

The golden shield was covered with dark red patterns of roses. The golden sword in the mech's right arm was polished like a mirror. The mech was logically designed and well balanced.

It was the same combination of sword and shield, but the golden mech's had its own fighting style. Every move was bold, quick, simple and effective. The sword and shield worked together seamlessly, as the mech pilot fought gracefully with these weapons.

The twin curved swords were four meters long, thick at the back and thinner towards the blades edge. The swords were sparingly decorated, with only a sharp point at the handles. The mech with these golden twin swords had no means of defense, opting for the more extreme choice of attack. Without proper defensive tools, it protected itself through its attacks instead. The mech was brave

and aggressive. Ye Chong noticed that this particular mech's arms must be specially designed, as they could move a lot faster than its two companions.

The last golden mech had a smaller and more compact build. Since it weighed less than the two other mechs, it could turn and move more deftly. It was similar to Ye Chong's clown mech, but much more superior in terms of design and build material. The mech pilot behind this mech was also quick to attack, making nasty strikes and blows that kept its enemies on guard.

Three elites!

Ye Chong made a quick estimation, and his face turned serious.

If the 12 mechs earlier were considered strong, then these three mechs were absolutely masters of their art! He was also a bit shaken by the fact that these three mechs were probably from the same organization, despite their very different designs. The gold colored alloy material was like the black colored black gold, probably a special kind of alloy.

Ye Chong believed that every part of the three mechs, every curve of them, were the result of countless experimentations. The organization behind these mechs must have excellent mech manufacturing talent. These three pilots were also very gifted, and Ye Chong knew that the organization must have more than these three working for them. After all, he had seen 10 of those golden mechs flying across the sky just the other day.

Putting Ye Chong's surprise aside, the balance of the fight outside was now changing quickly with the new arrivals.

The 12 mechs obeyed orders from the assassin-like golden mech and suddenly flew into the distance, leaving the five red-tailed beasts behind. They stopped when they were beyond the furthest of the five red-tailed beasts, and began to fly inwards. The 13 mechs formed a circular barrier, staying close to each other.

Ye Chong understood their intentions immediately.

They wanted to surround the red-tailed beasts, slowly restricting their space. Once the red-tailed beasts were forced towards the shield-sword mech and the twin-sword mech, who were at the center, these two powerful mechs would slowly kill off the creatures.

The battle proceeded as Ye Chong expected.

The 12 mechs closed in slowly towards the center, covering for each other in the process. The small-framed golden mech circled around their formation, assisting whichever mech that was attacked by the red-tailed beasts.

The plan worked. Ye Chong was able to witness the abilities of the two golden mechs surrounded in the center!

The golden shield-sword mech lured three red-tailed beasts towards itself, its sword swinging about like a huge shield, and the actual shield in its left hand defended itself flawlessly. By matching its pace and use of weaponry, the mech successfully drew three red-tailed beast towards itself. The three red-tailed beasts attacked madly, but the mech defended itself perfectly, blocking all of their attacks! The mech had simply warded off all the attacks from these three red-tailed beasts.

Strong! Ye Chong was impressed. He had never seen such a powerful defense. Ye Chong himself was more of an attacker, and he was always more inclined to attack, be it in hand-to-hand combat or mech battles. Even so, his defense was also quite good, mostly due to his strong determination and understanding his opponents well. However, he was still inferior compared to this golden shield-sword mech when it came to defense.

The golden mech with the two swords may attack ferociously, but Ye Chong thought the pilot was only just capable. Ye Chong's specialty was in attacking. The mech with the golden twin swords was strong, but not stronger than himself. If Ye Chong used Han

Jia, he could kill off all five red-tailed beasts himself.

The way he saw it, these five red-tailed beasts were not as strong as the six-fingered red-tailed beast he was pursuing before this.

Could it be that the red-tailed beast's evolution increased its power not linearly, but in an exponential way? The seemingly unrelated question came to Ye Chong.

If that was the case, would the red-tailed beast also require an exponential increase in resources to evolve further up the ladder?

Suddenly, the battle that was going on faded into the background. Ye Chong was suddenly plunged into the issue that was totally unrelated to the battle in front of him.

Ye Chong had already identified the number of digits as an indication of the red-tailed beast's evolution level. From Fei Si's research, it seemed that these creatures needed pure energy and metal to evolve. If that was the case, there must be some kind of relationship between the power gained from evolution and the two elements that led to it.

Suddenly, Ye Chong remembered that the creature in the underground cave of that primary planet had a teardrop mineralite clutched in its hand, and seemed to realize something from it.

However, Shang interrupted right then, "Ye, they're gone!"

Chapter 476: Only "1"

The 15 mechs had already left, leaving behind an almost completely destroyed Centuria University in the silent darkness. The red-tailed beasts were brought away, leaving no trace of their presence.

"Looks like we'll have to figure out something else," Ye Chong said helplessly as he looked down at the broken pieces of the microphoton repair device.

Shang offered, "Ye, you should spend more time on Muscle Man, it's more practical that way." The so-called Muscle Man was the experimental failure that Ye Chong got from the mech laboratory. Muscle Man was named by Mu, in the hopes that the mech would intimidate its enemies whenever it appeared. Ye Chong did not care about something as meaningless as naming his mech, so he did not argue with Shang about the mech's name.

"Hmm, looks like you're right." Ye Chong nodded. It sounded like a better plan.

The trip back was uneventful. Perhaps by taking enough rest during the day, Ye Chong did not feel sleepy. Hence, he went to the mech training ground in the building instead.

The Research Consortium really made room in their budget for them. In this average building, located in this average city, the facilities provided were luxurious. Take the mech training ground. Not only was it twice as large as its average equivalent, the training ground was also equipped with many support devices. They could capture the mech pilot's movements from any angle and relay them to the photon processor in a corner of the room, so that the mech pilot could study them and correct their movements. Besides, the training ground was equipped with a great variety of amenities that overshadowed the usual standards.

It was late at night, so the large training ground was empty. This

suited Ye Chong, since he did not like people watching him while he trained.

Ye Chong withdrew Muscle Man, climbed up the mech and entered the pilot cabin.

He looked at the triangular control console and inhaled deeply, quieting his mind to begin his training.

Unlike other mech pilots, Ye Chong did not rely on particular models of mechs. Ever since he left the trash planet, he had switched from one mech to another in no time at all. Every time it happened, he would have to get used to the new mech, so the process was not unfamiliar to him. The only thing made it more difficult this time was the weird structure of the control console.

There was a solution to this problem - he could change the console for a standard one. That would reduce the time he needed to get familiar with the mech. However, that would severely affect the mech's combat ability. The effect was severe enough for Ye Chong to throw this solution out of the window.

Start from the beginning, then!

Ye Chong looked at the triangular control console before him, his heart burning like fire! When had he ever been afraid of challenges?

He began to work. Ye Chong studied the console little by little, like a total beginner. It was like returning to his time of harsh training on the trash planet. He felt himself filled with purpose and hope.

On the empty training ground was a clumsy looking mech. It stumbled like a baby learning to walk, slowly and clumsily executing various movements. Its every move was fueled by the determination of its pilot!

Just how difficult was it to train so intensively for five hours straight?

Ye Chong was sweating all over, and panting heavily. His legs felt sluggish.

Ye Chong returned to his room and slept right away. Just 15 minutes after he returned to his room, the rest of the recruited staff began to wake up. In just a few moments, the empty training ground was full of mechs. Some of them noticed with interest that Number 231 was missing. This made the few who were curious about Number 231 disappointed. However, they quickly gathered themselves and began to train in earnest.

It was a fact of life that regardless of one's occupation, the path towards exceptional performance was committed and harsh training. All the mech pilots here knew this, and dared not waste their time dawdling.

When Ye Chong woke up, it was already noon. According to instructions, he should head towards the meeting place. He was the last person to reach there. Ye Chong sat in the last row of the hovercar without a single word.

The hovercar started just as he sat down.

"Good day, everyone. We are now heading towards the training camp. From now on, you are the first batch of official instructors from the Research Consortium's Crysound City branch. Congratulations for passing the tests! I'm honored to work with all of you." The one who spoke was a bald man. The top of his head shone brightly under the hovercar's lamps.

He laughed and said, "Almost forgot to introduce myself. I'm Senda, Mr Powell's second, and the person in charge for this activity. If you have any questions, feel free to speak up now. Since this is our first time organizing something like this, please forgive us for any unanticipated inconveniences."

Everyone looked at him, but no one said anything.

Senda did not mind it, and continued, "Since none of you have

questions, then let me talk about today's agenda. After we arrive at the training camp, we will separate into groups. You will receive your group number, and the students who attend our training camp will get to decide which group to join. Of course, each group cannot have more than 20 members. If any group reaches this limit, it will be removed from the options available for the students. Hmm, based on the number of students we have this round -" he looked over the mech pilots in front of him and grinned, "- we'll have exactly 20 students for each group."

As the bald man explained their itinerary for the day enthusiastically, Ye Chong did not share his sentiment. His mind was completely occupied by the triangular control console. At first, he thought the console was just weird, but his earlier exploring led him to notice that there was some kind of logic to the way the buttons were placed on the console. The stressful training exercise back then did not allow him to focus and think about it, but now that he had quieted down, he automatically began to analyze the problem again.

Once he entered into this silent mood, Ye Chong could not be disturbed. He did not hear anything that Senda was telling them excitedly.

It was not until the hovercar stopped that his thoughts were interrupted.

"Shang, what did he say just now?" Ye Chong felt lost looking at the other people moving into the training camp, and could only ask Shang for help.

"Don't disturb me," Shang replied impatiently, "I'm busy." The mech resumed its silence.

Ye Chong shrugged helplessly. Luckily he was at the rear of the group, and no one noticed him. Shang had been behaving these two days, perhaps because he knew that he nearly caused trouble for them both last time. The mech was also oddly quiet. Whenever

Ye Chong asked about it, he would just say that he was busy. Ye Chong did not know what the mech was busy about, and could get nothing out from Shang.

Fortunately, without the mech's insufferable interruptions, Ye Chong felt more at peace.

The instructors entered a meeting room, where a big holographic screen was placed in the center. On it were a row of numbers running from one to 25. Soon, each of them was given a number. Ye Chong' number was the last one - 25.

Senda stood up. "Alright, everyone. You should have your number by now. This will be your group's designated number. Next, it's time for the students to make their decisions." He turned to a working staff on the side and spoke a few words, signalling that they were ready.

The staff barked an order, and the digit below each of the numbers on the holographic screen began to climb up rapidly. In just 25 seconds, Group 5 was full. The mech pilot assigned with that number grinned widely. The faster a group was filled up, the stronger the instructor was as perceived by the students.

The other groups gained more and more members, but under the number 25 was the digit "1". This digit refused to budge.

Three minutes later, all the other groups were filled up, but Group 25 still only had "1"!

Everyone in the meeting room stared at Ye Chong. Sitting at the last row, holding the last number, with his group still not filled up, Ye Chong's posture was calm and at ease. His expression did not change, and he stared back unfazed at everyone else.

"Oh cr*p, I was too slow! There's only number 25 left, what do I do now?" One of the students looked devastated and upset.

Another student beside him added salt to his wound by saying,

"You're the one who's slow to decide. I told you to be quick, but you hesitated as usual. Now you're done for. Number 25, I heard he cheated, how else could he be hired? In any case, I'll never join his group."

"I should've just picked a random number, anything is better than this." The student who picked 25 looked regretful.

Xi Qing looked at the two of them quietly, and turned away. He had chosen Number 25 immediately, and he was the first to do so. That was why he was the only one who was under Group 25 so far. When White found out that he chose 25, the man thought he was crazy. However, Xi Qing knew what he was doing.

He quickly went to the gathering point for Group 25.

The atmosphere in the meeting room was plain awkward. On the holographic screen, the digit under the number 25 froze at "1". The other groups were all taken up, but even so, the digit below the number 25 did not change! The meeting room was now silent, but more than a few of them looked at Ye Chong with disdain, mockery and contempt.

What did this imply? It simply meant that the students, knowing they had no other choice, still did not want to choose Number 25. It also meant that no one believed in Number 25. Oh, that was not strictly accurate. The "1" on the holographic screen told everyone that at least one person supported him still!

Sitting in the last row, in the last place of all the groups, Ye Chong looked completely unaffected!

Chapter 477: Airhead?

The clock was ticking... so was the number of students enrolling to Instructor Number 25. The number froze for quite a while because of obvious reason - the students at first were reluctant to serve apprenticeship of this clearly impotent, airheaded instructor who got in his position probably by questionable means. But well, it was not like they had many options to begin with.

One could hear the teasing giggles and snickers resounding in the room, which Ye Chong seemed unaffected of. People might have looked down on his capabilities in teaching, but frankly they were very impressed of his high stress resistance. Most new instructors would have sunken under the table, deep into their grief if they were given a barrage of humiliation. This new instructor was rather young yet he was the same calm.

It took literally 15 minutes for Ye Chong's group to fill up completely.

"Alright, folks, we would proceed with the stage. The consortium had assigned staffs to escort all the groups to their respective site. The instructors would then lead all trainees to the training ground. So, the instructors can now meet with their trainees. Should you have any inquiries, please come see me. I hope we would have a fruitful and joyful training here," Senda sounded relieved. He was apparently feeling uneasy of such atmosphere.

"Follow me," said one workman hurriedly coming from the other end. He and the other members were on standby for the escorting session.

Ye Chong responded with a nod and quickly followed. Nothing happened at the meeting room affected him actually. He was preoccupied with the unique interface of his new mech. He had been thinking the workarounds of dishing out the most damage, so he was silent the whole time.

"Well, yeah, tsk, you have been looked down," said Shang, with an inhibited dissatisfaction. Shang was never the humanitarian with a heart of gold, it was rare to hear Shang speaking with such a tone.

"Look... down? I don't care where they placed their eyes?" Ye Chong was not sure what Shang meant since he had never bothered to observe the meeting room.

"Not that. They are seeing nothing in you, not even your strength."

"Oh..." Ye Chong finally comprehended the new phrase, "That's good? Why must I have them seeing something in me? I don't want their attention?"

Well, Ye Chong had a point. He would be better off being the unnoticed boy in the group. Shang could not really counter that argument.

"Mhm..." Shang was taking a different approach, "You are right of what you've said. But they aren't paying much for us to last here you know. We need more money and you know that. At this rate we might be stuck in Gray Valley for good."

"Right," nodded Ye Chong, "You have a point." Based on the information they had obtained from the virtual world, the consortium had the few exits under their enforcement, the strictest one too. It appeared to be no one could pass through the pathway without permit, not even a space rock, while only those cargos from He Yue could get the certificate of permission. Those merchants owning those cargos did not have an easy time either, as they had to undergo heavy inspections before they could reach the other side of the world. It came to both Mu and Ye Chong's agreement that they were going to stay in Gray Valley for quite some time.

Since they would very likely be stuck for the next few months, the problem proposed by Shang would truly be a problem in no

time. Ye Chong was very well-aware how it would be a trapping horror without gold in his pocket.

"They would be determining your pay based on the number of trainees who passed the final examination, and certainly the strength of these trainees too. Well, they are rather generous on that side of the payment."

"I understand," said Ye Chong flatly, as he caught the underlying meaning.

When Ye Chong had arrived at the site for Group No. 25, the trainees were already there, whose eyes were mostly, as one had guessed, filled with the disdain as if towards the filthiest dirt on their planet.

"Would you like to have a word? Or proceed with the training directly?" asked the worker.

"To the training ground." Ye Chong was the decisive kind who held the virtue of "less talk, more work".

"Hah!" One voice came from the group, "With your standards, I'm better off as the teacher. Shameless."

"Right?"

"Who are you to teach us?" The students were seemingly reluctant to be taught by this airheaded bum from nowhere.

The working man was finding the situation awkward as he never foresaw such dramatic reaction.

Ye Chong stared at the bunch of noisy kids in their early puberty.

"What? Want a piece of me? Hahahaha!" The trainees were laughing as the fiasco intensified.

Ye Chong frowned, he was enraged not because of the humiliations, but the lack of action, time-wasting behavior of these young trainees. He could tolerate everything other than wasting time. He felt the need to take action, in order to cease such

ridiculous waste of time.

Ye Chong's step crushed the ground as he vanished.

Xi Qing, who was watching Ye Chong at the dark corner, had his heart raced. He could hear his heart pounding in his ears, he was sweating as heat raided his throat.

Could it be?

His premonition was proven right as soon as he heard that loud cracking sound coming from the loudest guy in the group.

And the fuzzy silhouette of the instructor regained its structure.

Am I seeing things?

Xi Qing rubbed his eyes. His face was cold.

The guy was now in the instructor's hand, passing out. He was the one who started the entire angry mob attack.

What?

Xi Qing could feel a never-before-experienced chillness crawling his back.

He could not believe how his eyes failed to capture the instructor's speed. He did not manage to observe every gesture of this instructor. He did not even know how the instructor did the back-and-forth seizing. It was as if a giant skip of multiple animation frames in between.

The rascal might have started the commotion, but he was not the ordinary street bullies one would see on the street. He and the others were capable of joining the consortium training after all. These rebellious young men and women were potent to a certain extent.

The commotion died off the moment the youngsters saw their new classmate resting in the cradle of the devil. They could not remember an actual thing of the incident just now. They only could recall a shadow flashing by. The instructor soon grew

alarming in the eyes of these trainees as clearly the instructor could take them out before they knew a thing.

The worker was dropping his jaw.

"Move," instructed Ye Chong, with a glance as he walked towards the training ground with the fainted trainee in his hands.

They had to cooperate, unless they wanted to leave the world before adulthood.

Meanwhile Xi Qing was experiencing a boiling excitement in him after the sheer cold fear Ye Chong gave him. He knew he was right! He betted the right person! Expectation filled his head, as he wondered how much more surprise the instructor could bestow him.

Contrary to the other groups who were making bubbly, happy go lucky screams in their training ground, Ye Chong's group was brewing wordless, dust-rolling intensity on the field. The other groups were sending mockery through their eyes upon finding out the center of the dullest void being Group No. 25.

"This would be the training ground for your group from now on. The accommodation locates right nearby. It should fulfill most of your daily necessities. If you have any need, feel free to call me or contact Mr. Senda. Now, if you would kindly excuse me..." The escort seemed to have an utter change in his tone after the incident.

"Thank you. Take care," replied Ye Chong concisely.

Ye Chong was pretty happy of the size. The training ground could easily accommodate the 20 trainees he had.

The trainees were observing their new overwhelming instructor carefully, with curiosity in some of them and passion in the others.

And they would all play the Red Light, Green Light game, quickly silenced themselves into obedience the moment Ye Chong turned to them.

They were holding their breath, with fright in their eyes.

"Oh?" Ye Chong remembered he was lifting a problem and there he dropped the fainted trainee.

Thump! The trainees could hear the horrible ending of Humpty Dumpty on their mate. The problematic trainee rubbed his eyes and appeared to be under his sleeping spell.

Ye Chong decided to provide assistance in breaking the spell.

Ye Chong clipped the sleepy trainee, his eyes searched for a safe landing point. There was a pool. A perfect target. And he gave a skillful toss, lobbing the trainee.

Splash!

The eyes of the trainees enlarged drastically as they had just observed an inhumane act coming from their new instructor. Imagine they were the walking sandbag instead!

"Ah!" The trainee was instantly waken by the cold water. He quickly crawled out of the pool and dawdled towards the group, with confusion and fear in his steps.

"In your line. 5...4...", said Ye Chong.

The trainee began sprinting, as if losing the last bus in the night. He only regained his soul when he got back to the line.

Ye Chong was silent.

The training ground was silent.

The trainees were dead silent.

They would not want to anger this instructor a little. It was irony when they just called the instructor an airhead a second ago.

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... ..

The trainees were in fear of the never-ending silence, wondering if the instructor was planning the next diabolical execution to the

misbehaved.

The reality? Ye Chong was discussing with Shang regarding the minimum amount of pay he would need in order to progress, with details on the approximate number of successful trainees.

Chapter 478: Aiming High

Based on the detailed rules of payment determined by the consortium, both Shang and Ye Chong discovered that they would need at least 15 trainees to pass the examination or 7 of them with superior performance in order to attain the target income. That spelled a total challenge as it meant either the group became the top group in the entire course or both Shang and Ye Chong would have nothing. Well, if they managed to attain the target they would need not to worry of having an empty wallet for a long time, given that they did not have to pay like a king. There was also a specialized war machines given as one of the rewards by the consortium. Such model was a hard find in the market so Ye Chong could probably make a fortune out of it even if he did not intend to pilot it.

It came to a realization that Ye Chong's job required commitment. The consortium would pay one handsomely assuming one managed to produce what the consortium wanted. And clearly within short term Ye Chong would not find any job with higher pay than this. Both of them agreed to this. Shang could not generate figurative funds from hacking the virtual world of Gray Valley, so it was not like those days where Ye Chong could get money from nowhere before.

15 trainees who passed the test .. or 7 of them who performed really well... Ye Chong took a glance at his students. His face was grim.

Most of these students had been trained to do battles from afar since childhood. A lot of issues would surely arise if Ye Chong conducted a melee training. It boiled down to habits eventually. They had been wired with techniques of being a pilot, they had been taught to fight with ranged weaponry.

It would not be simple to alter any habit.

Fortunately, these pilots did have a good foundation. They were capable of piloting mech skillfully, which was a relief to Ye Chong.

The trainees stood obediently in front of the grim instructor, as silence magnified their heartbeats.

"Now, I want you all to deploy your own mech and complete the obstacle course," said Ye Chong, pointing at the obstacles far ahead. "One by one," he continued.

So these trainees deployed their mechs. In no time the training field became a giant parking lot of mechs. Ye Chong could see mechs in all sorts of color and shapes. His eyes did catch a few to his favor. He used to pilot the aged rusty Winnie back on Trash Planet-12 everyday, bearing with the worn out seat and the glitchy interface. These youngsters were lucky to be born with a silver spoon, or... at least not born among the trash.

Ye Chong walked till the very end of the line, only to find out that all of these mechs were ranged units. It did not sound feasible to run a melee training class when they were running with firearms and launchers. He eventually prompted the training plan provided by the consortium and discovered that all melee units had been sent to the frontline recently. There was no close-combat model left and for the trainees Ye Chong had to order a new batch of mechs, probably borrowed from somewhere else owned by the consortium.

And it would take 5 days for the mechs to arrive.

"You," Ye Chong pointed his finger at Xi Qing and said, "You would be the monitor from now on, watch the trainees on my behalf."

Ye Chong had noticed Xi Qing from the beginning since he was the only student who was calm and silent the whole time. The dramatic nature of a child in puberty was nowhere to be found on him.

"Yes, sir," Xi Qing accepted the assigned position which stirred envy among the other trainees.

"Start the obstacle course."

The mechs booted and zoomed towards the starting point one after another. They accelerated over the open pathway and decelerated to make perfect dodge through the obstacles. Ye Chong was impressed. These trainees were exceptional in piloting, much greater than the average pilots in the 5 major galaxies.

Nevertheless, Ye Chong frowned, realizing that these trainees needed no close-combat models but a better physique. Their vitality could last fine in ranged battles. But when it came the clashes of iron fists, they were fragile. Constant collision and thrust were typical in mech-brawling. A pilot could still be worn down quickly under the protection of hydraulic system.

These trainees would not be able to handle it. Well, naturally it was because their physique had yet undergone a complete puberty. So Ye Chong checked out the facilities in the field. Within the next few minutes, he got an idea.

"Okay, off your mechs now."

"Go there."

"Grip the handle."

"Yes. Now do as I count."

...

... ..

"Hah...", Xi Qing rubbed his sore arms, he could feel his limbs falling off after the few days of training that felt like a walk down the hellish path. They were given heavy trainings, nonchalantly by the inhumane instructor. The list of training just increased uncontrollably while his face remained as expressionless. No one dared to speak up.

They did power training the first session, then reflexibility training the second and reaction training the third...

And Xi Qing once thought he was given harsh trainings since he was born. The term "harsh training" had been given a whole new definition after the past few days. It was tough, that he actually blanked out as he ran the pavement. He thought he was becoming a mech. A fully mechanized athlete. They had a quota, regarding the number of training they had to fulfill and people were training dead.

They were convinced that the instructor would listen to nothing else than performance, judging from his surprising act on the first day of the course. The air-headed instructor was one destructive hulk as convinced by the time he took to complete their training. The instructor took only half of the time they did to complete the training.

He was not the babysitting kind of instructor as he would leave the group at the center and pick one corner to conduct his training. That was when a few of them thought they could take some short breaks themselves.

But little they knew that, the instructor knew it. He was one with the eyes of Odin and managed to identify the slackers to chastise them. Yes, it was severe to an extent that it sent them chills simply from thinking it.

The instructor probably nearly committed several murders on one day, sworn by every trainee who witnessed the scene of "punishment". They almost heard the siren of the ambulance wailing when they perceived the strange cracks coming from those students who turned flappy on the ground afterwards. They had recognized the cruelty of this instructor. There would be no tolerance towards misbehaving students from him.

They spent the next few days in panic, fearing that they would enrage the instructor.

The special training designed by the instructor had been lethargically repetitive. It looked simple, with only a few moves to be conducted... for the rest of the day of course. A gazillion times it felt. None of them actually fell out of the line surprisingly.

Their tenacity shocked Ye Chong as well, especially when he knew he had 3 female trainees in the line. He was expecting the females, whose vitality was genetically lower than the males, to collapse the first yet they managed throughout the entire course. He did not have them in his top 15 potential successful trainees at the beginning but now... perhaps he would need to reconsider.

Hmm...

Ye Chong had been quite busy the last few days too. He did not only carry out his own training but also pieced together the designing concept of the strange mech, particularly its interface, the efficient way to use it. Once he got the heck of it, he improved dramatically on his control. The layout was actually not an utter mess on the triangular interface. There was a sense of logic behind.

So Muscle Man had gotten less graceless, as both strength and dexterity were fully demonstrated under Ye Chong's control. The boys and girls were fascinated by his improvement. They had never imagined a boulder to be able to move with such agility, as if they were watching a ballet performed by an elephant. It did not make sense but it just happened. The instructor was moving like a baby in the mech a few days ago, and now he was moving like an assassin from one corner to another.

They had stopped doubting the instructor's profession. They were fully convinced by it. The air-headed instructor was no longer air-headed to them. He had ascended as an unspoken legend, well-respected by the trainees who felt pumped conducting his training.

The first phase of his training course had ended. Ye Chong was astonished by the commitment of these trainees who had

completed everything from A to Z. He acknowledged the difference in terms of standards between pilots of Gray Valley and others from the outside. These pilots from the Gray Valley were far more superior than all those so-called heroic young pilots he faced back in 5 major galaxies.

Well, Ye Chong could not observe much changes on his trainees' physique. It was expected since the physical training would be carried out throughout all phases of the course. But he knew that these trainees had changed, their physique had certainly improved to certain extend, at least ready for a mortal combat.

The mech units Ye Chong ordered had already arrived for quite some time, while the other groups had already initiated their pilot training.

"Very well, we would be conducting mech training today." Ye Chong could hear the squeak of excitement coming from the trainees the moment the keywords were uttered. They were going to make a leap of joy but their feet jerked upon seeing the expressionless instructor.

Kids were still kids... after all.

Sighed Ye Chong, seeing the blatant smiles on the children.

They were good pilots yet they remained as a group of undisciplined children. Compared to the Sangs, Ye Chong could not talk battle spirit or fighting will or the royalty of being a soldier serving their own survival. Back on those days, he would only need to give a word then the Sangs would conduct the training themselves. Well he could not expect much. They were children and they were not meant to be made into soldiers. Also, Ye Chong's training course was too packed to include discipline training.

"Now, in line, take your new mech," said Ye Chong upon leading them to the storage.

The machines were glowing in cold metallic colors, like a line of resting beast awaiting for release. The trainees could feel the whispering growls from the lifeless machinaries.

"Wait! That's D-6!!" screamed one of the trainees.

Chapter 479: D-6

A mech was usually meant for combats - treading the war field, firing missiles and lasers to annihilate the enemies - unless it was a non-combat model, a more commercialized unit, like an engineering model for example, instead of weaponry it was "armed" with ore detecting mechanism as well as the other devices; the maintenance model was equipped with professional maintenance tools and was meant to repair all sorts of damage on a mech or a spaceship. There was also the rescue units which, as the name suggested, was created for rescuing wandering pilots sending SOS signals.

There were a good array of professional models yet most people associated mech with combats, which was true to a certain extent. It was always war the mechs created in the galaxies but well, similar to the professional models, there were different kinds of warring models in the market. There were ranged units, melee units, supportive units, crowd control units, short-ranged assassinating units and so on. The list could go forever.

Most of these units could serve well in a battlefield. But there was hardly any of them which was made for pure massacre that lived up to the "less on the fancies, more on the blood" spirit - a mere killing machine with simplistic design, which would make the other advanced models look like the Knock-Down Hitman. Usually the real killing machine could only be seen in the dark, under development of well-funded organizations and would not show up at the war field easily. It was the monster, furnished with irregular weaponry, the questionable weapons threatening to all civilizations, which stirred up debates upon introduction.

It was uncommon at the market even in Gray Valley, let alone the 5 major galaxies, not even the war-competitive society in He Yue galaxy had such model flying around freely.

As the introduction led, D-6 came into your imagination. Yes, as

you would have guessed, D-6 was the model, a true, pure murdering model. The concept of its design had always revolved about maximizing destruction.

"D-6. A humanoid melee attacking model, fast in both mobility and reaction, created solely for the combative members of the consortium."

The brief introduction was confusing to Ye Chong. There was nothing helpful in the one-liner. Well, he was a mech artisan, a mech maker, he needed no manual to pilot D-6. His understanding was far more in-depth than the others, that he could identify the capabilities of the unit at first glance.

Ye Chong was a little astounded, as he did identify the complete bloodthirstiness in the design. The designer, to pursue greater mobility, forsook a portion of the mech's protection capacity. The cabin exterior was flimsy, that Ye Chong doubted if its pilot ever survived in the missile shower. The offense was different too. Unlike most melee attackers, it was not holding an alloy sword but a pair of knives - made out of unique minerals, with an ominous curve. There was no shield, as mentioned, a weaker defense. An all-out offensive unit with additional mechanisms hidden somewhere on the body. Ye Chong had yet figured them out but surely those were not meant for salvation.

Ye Chong realized something when he looked at D-6.

What would these trainees become?

They would probably end up at the war field anyway.

Ye Chong was not being sentimental but somehow there was something heavy in his chest. The design of the mech was radical yet it was a superior unit in fact. The catch was, it was not meant for beginners, it would require a more exceptional, experienced handling or it would only drive the pilots to destruction itself, before creating any. Ye Chong would not be convinced that there was nobody, in the entire well-established researching

organization, who had realized the problem that they should not provide a D-6 to a bunch of children in the early puberty. Ironically, there he was, with his bunch of children in their early puberty, standing by a line of D-6s.

They probably needed more force, and they needed it fast.

Ye Chong shook his head. That was never his problem, neither it was part of his decision. "Take your mech, pick any," he said before he left the room. "Xi Qing, watch your classmates." The students seemed really eager to try.

He sauntered on the empty training ground, as his ears perceived fading heyhoos probably from his trainees who just got their new toys. He stopped at one random point and sat on the ground. His eyes were lifted upon the murky day, his soul wandered somewhere.

...

...(Meanwhile)...

Xi Qing was caressing his new D-6 in simmering exhilaration. From today onwards, he would be the sole owner of this unit. He was not one who was born with a silver spoon. His first mech was a birthday present from his uncle 5 years ago. He had always wanted a brand new mech of his own. He trained hard since he was much younger. He was a quick-learner so he performed much better than the majority of his age despite the more inferior model he possessed.

The motive he participated this training course was simple. He was eyeing the rewards. One of the scarcity would also be scarce of options. The consortium offered a lot, the consortium would be his only hope to ascend into something. The entry requirement of the consortium recruitment was harsh, that one should give up if one was an average resident in the Gray Valley.

So Xi Qing was enthralled when he saw the recruitment

announcement. Certainly his strength was incompetent compared to the adults but he considered himself exceptional enough to have at least caught the authority's attention. And yes, he was right, he passed the entry test. He was almost there. He would embark on his career working in the top-notch organization after this training! He knew, the recruited would eventually be in the war field. It was never a white-collar occupation to begin with.

It was a treacherous path. But his heart, the will of a youth, thirsted for an adventure, advancement, an opportunity to mark down his own history!

It would be worth, regardless of the danger threatening his life out there. Xi Qing believed so his hands stroke the machinery. D-6 was standing there soundlessly yet it seemed to breathe homicides. It was love at first sight for Xi Qing when Ye Chong lifted the gate of the storeroom.

Xi Qing might not have the money to shop at the mech market but he had professional understanding of it and absolutely he recognized to what category the D-6 belonged immediately. "The consortium is sure generous in this. They actually gave trainees a D-6!" whispered Xi Qing in exclamation. The consortium produced all types of mechs but they would not put everything on sale for the public, like D-6 which was purely for their own army. It was efficient in destruction, though not as notorious as the other known units, well-recommended by most experienced pilots. In the black market, the price of a D-6 could probably purchase a dozen of planets or a bag of dwarf planets. The letter "D" meant nothing else than Death, not exclusive to the foes clearly.

"Everyone, on your mech, the training ground. Three minutes!" said the instructor coldly through the communicator.

And they leaped into the cabin clumsily upon waking up from their daydream.

20 D-6s formed themselves into 4 tidy lines on the training field.

It looked like a great formation of war field, except it appeared like a silly parking lot to Ye Chong the war savvy. He could identify a range of openings in this slightly rectangular formation, as he stood at the front in Muscle Man.

"Into 4 teams. From today onwards you'll remain in your current line. Other than the daily physical training, I'll also conduct lectures on mastering this mech you are piloting," said Ye Chong.

The trainees were excited. They had been bored by the repetitive physical training to death. And there was finally a change.

Klink! A loud noise interrupted Ye Chong.

The wall behind Ye Chong was cracking and falling.

"Watch out!" shouted one trainee who perceived the premonition.

A dusty mech emerged from the rubble and zoomed towards the instructor. Nobody could react in time, other than the real soldier in the field.

Ye Chong was far more experienced than all the trainees in fights. The moment he heard the clinking and thumping he had already laid his eyes on the projection. Muscle Man was indeed an experiment unit, but it was creation of probably a genius. The detection on the unit was impeccable. It might be a failure by the consortium but it was an expensive, exceptional failure.

Ye Chong knew there was a mech coming for him.

It was a D-6. And it was not a raid, judging from its orbit. It looked more like a machinery going out of control.

Ye Chong had two options. The first would be to make a simple dodge. That would be undesirable as the mech would crash into the formation of his trainees after he made the dodge and escaped the accident professionally. None of his trainees would be able to dodge in time.

So he was left with the second option.

Muscle Man drew a half-circle with its right leg, leading to a twist and a sink to the earth. The mechanical structure descended with the arms slightly curved over its body, leaving the two giant palms open at the sides.

Ye Chong expressionlessly added more commands.

Now!

Afterimages of his hands slid over the interface.

Crash!

The uncontrollable D-6 crashed into the hand of Muscle Man.

An accident would happen soon.

D-6 first collided with the right hand. The conservation of momentum had dented every part of the palm. Muscle Man immediately held the bottom of D-6 with its left hand.

The engines of both its arms were launched straightaway. The mechanical legs were exerting greater strength on the ground which burst into splattering mud as the legs submerged.

"Ah! Ahhh!" The pilot of D-6 felt a jerk and an uplifting force and began screaming in fear. D-6 then zoomed through the small gap and past Muscle Man's back.

There was another mech! Ye Chong was shocked as he saw a mech rapidly approaching in the detection system.

Such speed. Ye Chong squinted his eyes, trying to make out the appearance of the mech. But it was too fast, he could only perceive the red color.

Was that a raid?

Muscle Man withdrew its legs and its arms reformed into a battle position, like a mechanical jaguar, ready to pounce.

Chapter 480: Crazy Training I

Ye Chong watched emotionlessly as the mech closed in on him. He was ready to launch his attack once his opponent was within range. However, to his surprise, the mech spread its wings and swooped up, grazing past Ye Chong's head.

What was that about? Ye Chong looked at the rapidly climbing mech, unable to comprehend the pilot's intention. Muscle Man could only fight on the ground, and was useless in aerial battles. Still, Ye Chong prepared himself. Muscle Man's right leg pushed backwards, and the mech leapt forward and turned around, adjusting its position.

The anticipated aerial attack did not occur. The mech in the sky changed its course and flew towards the damaged D-6.

The mech was quick, and caught on to D-6 soon enough. Its two mechanical arms rested lightly on D-6, then its wings angled to make a U-turn in the air, and the two mechs ended up landing somewhere not far from Ye Chong.

"So it's going to rescue D-6," Ye Chong thought to himself. After ascertaining that the mech was not hostile, Ye Chong resumed a more neutral stance.

Now, he could finally examine the mech that appeared out of nowhere. It was in gold and light red, giving off a feeling of elegance and magnificence. The mech's body was slim and well balanced, with a strong sense of femininity. The wings on its back were composed of small and colorful feather pieces, like a pair of rainbow wings. The left arm had a diamond shaped shield, while a laser sword's hilt was secured to its right leg, near the knee.

It was rare to see protective fins on close range mechs. Usually, protective fins were used for to stabilize atmospheric flight, and long range mechs would definitely benefit from them. For close range mechs, however, large and vulnerable fins would become

easy target. Besides, since close range mechs were built to be physically stronger, they were often much heavier than long range mechs. The mech in front of Ye Chong was clearly designed for long ranged combat.

This long range mech was actually used for close range combat. Ye Chong could already guess who it was - it must be one of the instructors from a nearby training ground. D-6 should be piloted by one of the instructor's students.

"I'm so sorry. My student lost control of his mech and interrupted your group, please accept my humblest apologies," a pleasant female voice said.

"Oh, it's alright," Ye Chong replied calmly. It was as he expected.

"I am Group 16's instructor, Shen Ruxue. I don't know your name yet. Perhaps you'll accept my invitation to dinner as re-compensation," from the mech's audio broadcast came a mellow female voice. All of Ye Chong's students who overheard her looked jealous of him. Shen Ruxue had gathered the most attention amongst all the instructors, since she was the only woman instructor, and a beautiful one at that. Many students were eager to join her group, but before they could, the 16 spots were snatched up very quickly.

Ye Chong looked at the time, and declined, "Sorry, I'm busy." In fact, he was getting rather impatient. His entire training schedule was jam packed, there was no time to spare. Now, this instructor from Group 16 was saying all these useless words. To him, it was just a waste of time.

"A pretty lady!" A joyful voice appeared in Ye Chong's mind. Ye Chong sighed inside. As expected, she had gotten Shang's attention! He knew that Shang was far more interested in beautiful women than he was, and could be very stubborn about them. More importantly, Shang's blabbering never failed to tire his listeners, and even Ye Chong could not take him on.

"Wah, Ye, it's a real pretty lady. Heavens, finally, something interesting in this dark existence of ours! Yes, her measurements, body shape, weight, it's all in my archive now. Ye, she's asking you out for dinner, what an opportunity, go for it! Why not?" Shang was practically shouting in excitement.

Ye Chong kept his mouth shut and ignored Shang.

Shen Ruxue did not expect that Ye Chong would reject her. She was slightly taken aback, but quickly replied with some anger in her tone, "I see, you don't think I'm worthy. Then consider my invitation a shameless attempt. Goodbye!" With that, she lifted that damaged D-6 and took off, flying towards a neighbouring training ground.

"Sigh, Ye, don't be so rigid! Wow, look at these numbers, it's wonderful, her measurements are almost perfect, she's definitely first class!" Ye Chong could imagine Shang shaking his huge mechanical head, blinking his blue bionic eyes erratically as he muttered indulgently.

A thin smile appeared on Ye Chong's lips, but he ignored the mech still, and focused on his new students.

"Everyone, get familiar with your mechs. You must at least pass Level 3 of the directional change arena."

Ye Chong's cold voice echoed across the training ground. All his students gathered themselves and quickly moved their D-6's towards the directional change arena, forgetting whatever nonsense ideas they were having.

"Ye, what do you think about that Shen Ruxue's capabilities?" Shang knew exactly how to gain Ye Chong's attention.

As expected, Ye Chong began to rewind his memory to what happened earlier. He thought about it for a moment and replied confidently, "She's good. But I don't know what else her mech was capable of." Ye Chong may not have fought against her before, but

he could still tell that Shen Ruxue was a top notch mech pilot.

"I see, such a competent pilot. Ye, you have to watch out," Shang switched the topic so quickly that Ye Chong thought it odd.

"Why?"

"She's strong, much stronger than her initial performance suggests. Besides, I suspect that she's trying to get closer to you," Shang analyzed calmly, unlike his usual exaggerative self.

"Trying to get closer to me?" Ye Chong was shocked.

"Yes. I noticed something before the accident occurred. Hehe, that pretty girl was having a practice battle with that D-6. That D-6 lost its balance because of a direct attack from her. They were about 571 meters from the perimeter fence when it happened. With her skills, she was definitely capable of stopping the D-6 before it crashed into the fence. However, she let the D-6 went down anyway. This means that she's planning something." Shang sounded so cold and calculative now that Ye Chong thought he sounded like Mu.

"Why would she do that?" Ye Chong stroked his chin, deep in thought.

However, Shang replied irresponsibly, "How would I know?" Then, he suggested slyly, "Sigh, Ye, talk to her when you have the chance, what's the harm in that, hehe ..."

Ye Chong was completely unmoved by Shang's suggestion, and returned to his job.

Ever since the wall fencing was damaged, no one came to repair it. Students from both groups kept quiet about the incident as well, and did not report it to admin. Of course, Ye Chong thought it was a bother to do such a thing, while his students hoped against hope for the wall to be torn down, so that both groups could train together! Strangely, no one from the other group reported the damaged fence to the staff as well.

Hence, the two groups began to interact more frequently. Mechs would occasionally be seen flying through the hole in the wall to meet their friends on the other side. Ye Chong did not bring up the issue. If his students followed his training schedule, he saw no reason to interfere with their personal time.

That was what Ye Chong believed in. He would practice with Muscle Man every day, and would often be the last one to leave the training ground. The students grew respectful of their reserved instructor. The man might not be particularly strong, but his determination alone was a rare quality. Of course, Ye Chong did not know that he had inspired his students. Ye Chong grew more and more familiar with Muscle Man, to the point where he knew that he would be able to win against the instructor in the sword-shield mech!

The students imagined that their instructor was like a monster machine that never tired. His training routine was always so dry, and his moves were too simple and straightforward. However, the instructor repeated his training every day for tens of thousands of times.

They did not know how strong their instructor was in combat, since they had never had combat training so far. Their instructor had only asked them to repeat the most simple exercises.

However, even these simple exercises nearly drove them crazy!

At first, they were asked to crash their D-6s right into some targets, and repeat the crashing until all their targets were destroyed.

This simple training became a torture to every student. They had to watch their target grow larger and larger in their eyes before crashing right into it. The fear involved was enough to make one hesitate. At first, many students would close their eyes at the last moment before they crash. Moreover, these high speed crashes were still dizzying despite the protection offered by the mech

hydraulic suspension systems. Often the students would throw up violently right after they exit their mechs. However, their instructor was not known for mercy.

Done throwing up? Get back to crashing!

Even Xi Qing vomited all over himself, his face pale from the ordeal. This crashing training went on for three days, and the students crashed into their targets for many, many times. The fear that initially haunted them soon turned into numbness.

This crazy training shocked the students who came over the fence from Shen Ruxue's group. It was quite some time before any of Group 16's students dropped by for a visit.

After the first step in their training, they were asked to fly their D-6s at high speed towards a target, make a turn when reaching 3 meters away from the target, then slash out with a sword and hit said target. What Ye Chong asked for was simple - sufficiently high speed and accuracy in hitting the target. Sufficiently high speed referred to the maximum speed of the D-6. Accuracy in hitting the target meant hitting no further than 10 centimeters off center.

The training was so difficult that the students could only gape in disbelief. Most of them cursed their insane instructor quietly. Who in the galaxy would fight against an enemy at their maximum speed? After all, the faster a mech was moving, the harder it was to pilot it. 10 centimeters? Were their enemies going to be flies?

However, upon seeing their instructor's apathetic expression, the students braced themselves for this impossible training.

Chapter 481: Crazy Training II

Shen Ruxue watched the students at the opposite training ground, doing their crazy routines, and reflected to herself that Group 25's instructor was indeed not an ordinary man. She did not harbor any complicated designs for Ye Chong, as Shang had suggested, but she was a touch curious of him, so she tested him. As expected, the widely mocked instructor of Group 25 was stronger than commonly believed. However, she could not tell exactly how good he was.

She found out from a few female students of Group 25 that their serious looking instructor was very good at combat, and though his mech piloting skills were still indiscernible, he would not be too shabby in it.

Shen Ruxue gave up on further plans of probing him. It was clear from Group 25's training routine that their instructor was no kind person, but a ruthless character. She did not want to be involved with someone like that.

Ye Chong subtly nodded as he watched the students crashed fearlessly into the obstacles. The students were so used to long range attacking that they would often widen the distance with their enemies unconsciously. They would be afraid of getting close to their enemies, a psychological barrier that almost every long range mech pilot would have.

Ye Chong believed that if they could not endure this training, then that they would never become competent close range mech pilots. To overcome this psychological barrier, Ye Chong had prepared these seemingly violent exercises for them.

Now, the exercises seemed to do the trick. At least the students were now all immune to this instinctive fear, though whether the training itself would leave an emotional scar was another matter that Ye Chong did not consider.

His students were mostly trained in combat, and even some of the female students could qualify as half of an expert. After completing these two exercises, his students discussed mech combat among themselves. Ye Chong did not interfere. He felt that it was way easier for them to fight in their own ways before making his observations on them.

However, he was surprised to see that the students fought almost like they were in a serious battle. A few of them must have acted more boldly after overcoming their psychological barriers.

These students were good! Especially the one called Xi Qing. He could always keep his calm, even when in a dire situation, and would often be able to win despite the odds against him.

"Well, I should pay more attention to him," Ye Chong thought to himself.

Ye Chong's life became more routine-like. Everyday, he would spend most of his time training his students, and the rest of the day would be dedicated to training with Muscle Man or entering the virtual world. Shang, however, seemed to have disappeared, doing who knew what.

The hottest news in the virtual world were about sightings of red-tailed beasts, casualties and body counts etc, during this time. Some people were able to deduce that the red-tailed beasts must have found a way into Gray Valley. One of the most shocking media out there was a holographic recording of a red-tailed beast swallowing a large amount of energy cells, and then evolving.

This holographic recording sent a message to the people - these creatures could absorb pure energy. Ye Chong was not surprised when he saw the recording. It was just a proof of Fei Si's hypothesis.

The infiltration of the red-tailed beasts into Gray Valley ignited a riot. In just the blink of an eye, Gray Valley was plunged into mayhem. Public safety was compromised, and news of battles

between humans and red-tailed beasts became common.

When the red-tailed beasts entered the atmosphere, their physical advantages were amplified. Humans often had to pay a high price to kill them. The frontline was no longer the only place in need of close range mech pilots - this specialized skill set was in high demand in every city.

Fortunately, the humans were still successful in defending the center of Gray Valley. However, Ye Chong could see that there were more and more red-tailed beasts that entered Gray Valley.

On some planets, people no longer dared to wander far from the city, for fear of encountering red-tailed beasts in the rural areas. The cities were more like fortresses, protected by loads of armaments. Resident mech pilots volunteered to keep their homes safe, that's why the red-tailed beasts did not manage to breach the cities yet.

The situation would only get worse. Ye Chong looked at a chart that showed the frequency of incidents related to red-tailed beasts across time. The graph was climbing up steeply.

Crysound City's security measures were tightened. The streets were mostly empty, except for the occasional passerby. Fortunately, with Planet Henna nearby at the frontline, military presence was strong in the area, and it was still generally safe for the locals.

"Ye!" Shang finally came out of his lengthy hiding.

"Shang!" Ye Chong greeted in surprise.

"Hehe, I'll let you in on good news ..." Shang sounded excited.

Xi Qing dragged himself slowly towards the nutrition tank. He lifted the lid on the tank and slipped unceremoniously into it. The nutrition fluid in the tank would rapidly replenish whatever nutrients his body needed, so that he could physically recover as

soon as possible.

Once upon a time, such a luxury would have been unattainable for him. He had long heard of its various benefits, and now that he had the chance, he had used the tank every single day. The nutrition tank was effective, but being submerged inside was very uncomfortable. It was like having millions of ants biting every muscle and bone in your body. For that reason, not many people actually used it.

Xi Qing gritted his teeth, looking tortured, but he was holding on. A few students walked past the nutrition tank room and saw Xi Qing submerged in the nutrition fluid. They looked impressed. This designated group leader of theirs was at least respected by his members.

The nutrition fluid reached up to his neck, spinning fast so as to encourage faster nutrition absorption and produce a massaging effect. Xi Qing thought of his instructor, and wondered if he had made the right choice.

He knew that his instructor was definitely stronger than what his performance during the test suggested. However, no one knew exactly how capable he was. So far, the man had not participated in mech combat practice with them. They were also going through the most simplest and driest of trainings. Even so, the instructor had demanded very high standards in these trainings!

Nonetheless, he had completed them! Xi Qing's lips lifted into a faint smile. He was the first in his group to have completed their training according to their instructor's standards. At first, no one believed that anyone could have done it as their instructor wanted, Xi Qing included. To think that he had really achieved it! The joy of success made the pain in his body fade into the background.

The instructor had said, he remembered clearly, that he would personally teach combat to any student who completed the trainings. This was the part that he had been waiting for. He would

be able to tell how strong his instructor really was, and whether or not his judgment had been wrong.

However, Xi Qing's happiness did not last long. He had always thought that, with the Research Consortium taking part in the war, it would be over very quickly. However, the war had progressed to its current state, one far more serious than he expected.

When will this war end? Xi Qing wondered, lost in thought.

Arwa's expression was frozen. Bei Guang looked similarly aggrieved too, and did not say a word. No one dared to approach the Xiao Family's 1st and 2nd Platoon Commanders, not with the way they looked.

Arwa suddenly burst out in rage, "Those fools, are they suicidal? Didn't they know that is no different from killing ourselves? Who the f*ck suggested this idea, I'm going to end him -"

Arwa's outburst came from within the meeting room. The guards who stood outside kept their silence. They could not understand, just what kind of horrible thing that someone had done to make even their calm Platoon Commander Arwa explode in anger.

"The Alliance made the decision last night. Basically, 80 percent of the members agreed to this battle plan," Bei Guang said with a low voice.

"Are they nuts? 80 percent? This is crazy! We don't even know what's inside. It's insane to gamble all we have in this full on attack!" Arwa's face was one of disbelief. The Alliance had decided on a battle plan last night, one that would gather all their military forces and charge right into the purple gas cloud!

Bei Guang's face betrayed no emotion as he continued, "They all have their own men, and it is thanks to mediation by the Research Consortium that they had all joined in the war. With more and

more red-tailed beasts infiltrating from the rear, they face a huge pressure and want to return to protect their own territories. You may not know this, but He Yue Galaxy is in chaos right now, perhaps even more so than us. The red-tailed beasts are spreading. Aside from Planet Yi Ju and its surroundings, where the collision army is, the other places are all in a state of unrest. These people are just afraid that we will end up the same at the rear."

Arwa remained silent for a long while before forcing out a question, "What about us?"

"The Young Miss has agreed to it," Bei Guang replied softly.

Arwa slumped into his sofa.

"Perhaps the situation is not as bad as you think. The attack will be led by the best and brightest of the entire Gray Valley! Even the Golden Army of the Research Consortium is participating," Bei Guang consoled Arwa.

Arwa was about to say something, but changed his mind and instead uttered, "I really hope so!"

Chapter 482: Crazy Training III

Xi Qing's long awaited personal training by the instructor himself had finally arrived. He had prepared long and hard for this day.

The two mechs faced each other. One was Xi Qing's D-6, and the other, Ye Chong's Muscle Man. Everyone in Group 25 halted their training and came to watch the fight. The instructor's ability in mech piloting had always been a mystery to them. They would certainly not miss out on the chance to watch him fight in his mech.

"You attack first," Ye Chong ordered simply.

"Alright," Xi Qing was overjoyed and replied excitedly. He made his move instantly.

D-6 lowered itself down, pushing itself forward with its bent legs. Its engines were on on full power, and both hands were already armed with swords. As Xi Qing watched the awkward looking mech growing larger and larger in his eyes, he realized that he was feeling very calm inside.

The mech seemed to ignore his move and did not react. Xi Qing was patient, and did not get worked up because of it.

Close the distance, get in position, strike his target!

Xi Qing cleared his mind of all distractions as he types the commands quickly on his controls. The two swords in D-6's hands rotated, their hilts now pointed to the front.

Wham! The mech's legs stomped heavily on the ground, and as its engines swerved in another direction, D-6's movements became a blur.

Geometrical veering!

D-6 accelerated abruptly to its maximum speed, and the sword in its left hand silently pointing towards Muscle Man's throat. His

right hand held its sword back, a hidden threat that could strike out at any time.

The students who were watching all gasped in surprise. The series of movements were so fast that it caught them off guard. Some of the more pretentious students began to imagine themselves at the receiving end, and considered their chances of avoiding the attack - they quickly concluded that they would not be able to do so. These pretentious students felt humiliated upon this realization.

Xi Qing had put a lot of thought into this attack. He was smart, and knew that the instructor would most likely ask him to attack first. He would be given that advantage. Hence, he came up with this strategy! He was confident that it would be able to at least cause trouble for the instructor, if not outright defeat him.

Strategically speaking, this was an example of a prepared attack launched against an unprepared opponent!

Muscle Man's body grew larger and larger in his eyes. D-6 had already locked on to his target. However, Muscle Man did not move still. Could his instructor fail to come up with a countermove? Impossible! Xi Qing dismissed the thought immediately. However, he could not afford to consider it further. He would not want to disturb his momentum just because he could not read his opponent's intention.

Now! Xi Qing's eyes glowed. He quickly entered his preset commands.

Just then, the inert Muscle Man began to move!

Knees bent, lunge forward, attack! The clumsy Muscle Man was now like a human fighter, its every move deft and fluid. Its huge body and unwieldy limbs produced a sharp contrast with its movements. The paradox was strange to watch.

Muscle Man suddenly accelerated to a point 30 degrees to the

right of the D-6 while swiping out with its left leg.

Xi Qing was secretly pleased. In all the possible scenarios he considered, this was one of them. His instructor would be able to escape his own attack range and change the fighting dynamics between them.

Of course, if Xi Qing had anticipated this, he would have a countermeasure in place!

D-6 swiped out with its right sword, took a right step back, then slashed downwards with the sword in its left hand.

Both mechs were moving fast. D-6's right hand sword was going for Muscle Man's throat, while its left hand kept the mech from escaping. Their instructor was about to lose! The students watched anxiously. It was not exactly shocking if their instructor lost, but Xi Qing's attack was truly vicious and well planned! It did not surprise them that their instructor would lose.

As expected, Xi Qing was a capable man! Everyone looked to D-6 with admiration.

Just when everyone thought the fight was over, Muscle Man finally overcome its passive role and did something that everyone who was watching would never forget!

Muscle Man did not pull back its left leg, which had missed its target. Instead, its right leg suddenly kicked upwards towards D-6's left rib. It was strange to see Muscle Man with both its legs not touching the ground, while its upper body bent down in a physically staggering manner as D-6's right hand sword grazed past its face.

His opponent's move was completely unexpected by Xi Qing. Nevertheless, he did not panic. So far, he had the upper hand. As long as he did not make any mistakes, he would win this round.

D-6 twisted its body to the side, avoiding Muscle Man's right leg while its left hand directed the sword towards Muscle Man. Even

though Muscle Man had thick armor, Xi Qing that knew that this premeditated strike would definitely cause significant damage.

With both its feet off the ground, Muscle Man once again did the impossible, rotating its body in midair like a top! All the students watched in astonishment as Muscle Man turned into a blur from its fast movements, thinking - how did he do it?

Klang! A sharp sound of metal against metal was heard. The sword in D-6's left hand hit against the rapidly spinning metal body and was flung away into the distance, like it was being repelled away by a hammer!

Xi Qing was in danger! Everyone who was watching realized this immediately. With the sword in its left hand gone, D-6's chest was wide open. In the blink of an eye, the balance of the fight shifted dramatically.

Muscle Man suddenly reached out and grabbed onto D-6's left hand. Since Muscle Man was bulky, and currently spinning very quickly, D-6 lost its balance instantly.

Wam! Muscle Man's two thickset mechanical legs slammed into the ground intimidatingly.

Shoulder punches, knee kicks ...

D-6 never had the chance to land properly as it received all the attacks helplessly. The students had been trained for long distance combat since they were young, and had never seen such a violent fight. The two mechs that stood over 10 meters each now fought against each other in close quarters. Every hit was enough to make one cringe. The ground seemed to be trembling as the students watched in suspense.

Dust was sent flying all over the place as the two mechs fought, but the dull and loud sounds of metal against metal could still be heard clearly.

Soon, the yellow dust settled.

The students could finally see the two mechs. A sharp parrying spear was pointed straight at D-6 throat, barely five millimeters away from its target. The parrying spear gleamed with typical metallic coldness. At the other end of the parrying spear was a huge and seemingly unwieldy mechanical hand.

The students gave a thunderous applause, finally releasing the excitement that had been building in them. They cheered as loud as they could, waving their hands excitedly as their faces blushed with eagerness.

Through the hole in the fence, Shen Ruxue watched in shock.

The real life combat training had stirred up all the students, encouraging them to train harder. They were all eager to learn directly under their instructor. However, their instructor had said that only those who completed his training according to his standards would be personally taught. Hence, the training ground was lit up with burning enthusiasm as the students underwent their training impatiently, unwilling to be left behind.

The one who was envied the most on the training ground was Xi Qing. Their instructor had spent almost all his time on him. However, it was Xi Qing who felt the gloomiest of them all. After just a few rounds, his instructor could read him like a book. Hence, his situation turned depressing. Everytime he fought against his instructor, he would be beaten to the ground, and everytime he trained, he would have to be fully alert. Whenever he stood in front of his instructor, he could feel a killing aura emanating from him. His instructor would make his killing aura more and more intense that it chilled him to the bone. Once, his mind went blank until his instructor's mech pointed its parrying spear at him, pulling him out of his fear.

"He must have killed people before! And more than a few of them!" Xi Qing thought to himself, but never had the courage to ask his instructor about it.

On the other hand, Xi Qing could feel himself remarkably improving every day. He no longer paralyzed in fear at his instructor's killing aura. He finally understood why the instructor had ordered them to practice those dry and basic moves. Whenever he suffered under the overwhelming attacks from his instructor, there was no time for fancy moves. Besides, Xi Qing had noticed keenly that his instructor had almost always used those basic moves, but executing them faster! These basic moves became powerful weapons when done by the instructor himself. He never had the chance to fight back whenever he fought against his instructor.

However, this intense daily training with his instructor would not last long. The other students were beginning to complete the training that the instructor had set for them.

Every since Ye Chong's fight with Xi Qing, the other students were all eager to get their chance. Five days later, all the students succeeded in completing their training.

Ye Chong never went easy with his students. On the contrary, he dialed up his killing aura to stimulate his students. He was not skilled in teaching, and could only rely on this method. Fortunately, the students were all fast learners. Aside from that, the daily combat training sessions allowed him to get used to Muscle Man faster. Hence, Ye Chong decided to treat the combat training as his own training, and kept on it everyday from dawn till dusk.

Ye Chong never knew that his actions made his students even more respectful of him. The way they saw it, they had a very committed instructor who would always train all day long, and with each and every one of them. They were also intrigued by their instructor's stamina. Surely it took a lot of strength to be able to fight all day!

Little by little, Ye Chong began to gain respect from his students unawares.

Chapter 483: Situation

"Ye, we have a situation," Shang said with concern. In front of Ye Chong was a holographic screen showing the star chart of Gray Valley. There were many areas highlighted in red. Gray Valley looked like a sick patient covered with angry rashes, in a critical situation. The red zones were areas where red-tailed beasts were sighted.

Shang and Mu had worked together and decrypted Gray Valley's virtual world computation system. After overcoming this difficult obstacle, Shang slipped quietly into the virtual world to gather useful information.

There was a spike in news related to red-tailed beast recently. Cities began to feel the pressure, and the number of casualties were hiking up crazily. Even the atmosphere within the training camp had grown tense. People were no longer smiling so easily. Everyone was training hard.

All this while, everyone in Gray Valley had been confident of winning the war. However, the situation had descended quickly into chaos.

Ye Chong studied at the bruised star chart quietly. He considered for a moment and asked, "How is security like right now at the Gateway towards He Yue Galaxy?"

"Hmm, from what I gather, security has laxed recently, but not enough for you to pass through," Shang replied.

Shang was better than Mu in analyzing intel. This surprised Ye Chong, and it was only after Shang explained that he understood why. Shang was a pro in psychology, and could often deduce useful information from seemingly irrelevant information. This was a quality that Mu lacked.

Financially speaking, they could afford to leave where they were,

but they had decided to stay instead. If they left, they might encounter the red-tailed beasts in outer space, and that was dangerous. Leaving Planet Henna right now would be a risky move. Even with Ye Chong's extraordinary abilities, it was still necessary to act cautiously in the current state of unrest.

In a society of unrest, the power of just one person was like a drop in the ocean. Hence, after discussion with Shang, Ye Chong had decided to stay and observe the situation.

Every day he trained himself by training his students, and his students' attacks became more and more violent. Even Xi Qing could not keep his cool. Ye Chong understood them, and did not hold back himself. In the end, he organized them into groups of five, and he would fight each group in turn. This allowed the students to practice coordination, while giving him some kind of challenge.

However, to Ye Chong's surprise, his students were not capable of any kind of strategizing. He had to teach them how to coordinate amongst themselves, how to choose their positions.

If only one of the Sang Tribe members were here. In terms of strategizing, the Sang Tribe would take first place, and the Xi Feng Tribe placed second.

Shang took unexpected interest in his task. He gathered large volumes of recordings about strategizing and tactics from the virtual world, analyzed them, then came up with an original Shang's Theory of War. To Ye Chong's astonishment, Shang's theories were very effective.

Shang was positively euphoric with Ye Chong's acknowledgement, and remained in that state of excitement for the next few days.

Ye Chong used Shang's theories to teach his students. Unlike Mu's precision and accuracy, Shang operated in a whole other realm. His methods were simple and flexible. For example, Shang

had designed a formula of coordination for five-person squads. It did not demand fixed roles for each member, but instead acted as a guide for the members to respond to each other's movements. However, the squad members were restricted in the ways they could respond according to Shang's theories.

Ye Chong did not study his theories deeply before he began to teach them to his students. At first, they improved very slowly. However, these theories and Ye Chong's rich combat experience helped the students improve in their coordination skills tremendously and in a very short time.

Now, Ye Chong's battle with the five-member squads were no longer so easy. The students, in turn, became even more respectful of their instructor. They knew exactly how powerful they were once they acted as a squad, but even so, their instructor had won against them decisively, every single time.

Just how strong was their instructor? No one had the answer to that question, but Ye Chong was slowly becoming something of an enigma to them.

Ye Chong oddly noticed that the working staff in the training camp did not seem to pay much notice to them. The staff who came daily in the beginning no longer visited. Such a large scale training camp was now apparently left to their own devices. Had something happened?

Ye Chong did not care, and continued to focus on his training every day. His students benefited from training with him, and vice versa. He never had the chance to train against multiple opponents before this. Additionally, the students may not be particularly capable, but they were now fighting with Ye Chong's typical style - simple but effective. These little Ye Chong's offered Ye Chong himself a decent challenge.

Five D-6's whooshed across the training ground in a seemingly random manner, but in fact they had already surrounded Ye

Chong. Each mech was covered by two mechs on its sides. If Muscle Man attempted to target any one of them, the other two mechs would step in to interfere.

Inside his pilot cabin, Ye Chong's dull eyes began to show a tiny ripple of emotion.

His students were getting better and better at coordination. Their deceptively simple positions had actually set up three traps for him. Each student alone was still very much inferior against a veteran mech pilot. However, they were still new to mechs, and there were no habits that they cannot change yet to suit their teamwork. Besides, they were now at an age where they could absorb knowledge like a sponge. They were also all hardworking and persistent. That was how they managed to form such a real life combat worthy squad in such a short time.

Making things challenging for Ye Chong meant that they were now quite strong. Ye Chong might not mind his salary too much, but he believed that if his students took the exams now, they would definitely pass with flying colors.

Now, however ...

Ye Chong took a sweeping glance at the five D-6's, having no intention of making it easy for them. He fought each training battle with all he got. That was his secret to improving himself. It was also why his students could improve so quickly.

Ye Chong understood their coordination methods more than they did themselves. Aside from that, the students were still far from invincible even though they had already improved a lot.

Ye Chong made a bluff to attack the frontmost mech, then quickly turned back, creating an opening in the squad using this sudden motion. He then forced himself into this opening, creating a moment of confusion in the squad.

The confusion lasted for only two seconds, but it was enough for

Ye Chong.

He made sudden veers, quick bursts of attacks, bluffs behind bluffs...

The five D-6's were quickly unraveled, losing their formation. Two of them lunged at Muscle Man, trying to buy time for their comrades to get back into formation. Ye Chong obviously did not allow it to happen.

He made another convincing bluff, changing directions three times in a row, and escaped the two D-6's. He then pushed himself backwards in a few powerful steps, putting himself between the two D-6's.

Muscle Man used a commonly seen move in hand-to-hand combat - pushing his elbows back to strike - and began his attacks.

Muscle Man was like a wild beast, unleashing all the energy that threatened to burst through its body. The mech's attacks were like waves in a tsunami. The earth groaned every time it stomped its heavy legs onto the ground. Bang bang bang bang! The steps sounded like a war drum, and it made the students who were watching tremble in excitement. Dust was sent flying all over the training ground as the D-6's were thrown out of the field, one by one.

The observing students discussed about the details of the fight, and even the students in the D-6's climbed out of their pilot cabins to join the discussion. Instead of dejection, their faces showed eagerness.

Ye Chong did not use Muscle Man's assault weapons. This was done not out of concern for his students or making things more difficult for himself. He knew that if he used those weapons, the D-6's would be damaged, and they would lose a lot of time while the mechs were sent to be fixed.

Even so, he was slowly feeling the pressure. His students were

improving very quickly, a truly surprising turn of events. They threw themselves completely into the battle, and were not distracted by anything that was happening outside of it. Perhaps the worsening situation in Gray Valley was a driving factor.

"Ye, something's wrong!" Shang interrupted Ye Chong's training, sounding panicked.

A news header appeared on Muscle Man's holographic screen.

"Alliance Frontline Thoroughly Defeated!" The red letters looked menacing.

Ye Chong read on, and his expression turned grim.

A few days ago, Shang found out that there was to be a large scale military operation at the frontline. Ye Chong found himself thinking about that piece of intel as he read the news. It seemed to have come from an interview with a few mech pilots who survived. The United Army had gathered all available forces in a bid to kill all the red-tailed beasts in the purple gas cloud and end the war, but had instead lost the battle. It was said that less than 10 percent of the soldiers returned alive. More importantly, a large group of red-tailed beasts were heading their way! The creatures were pursuing the retreating soldiers, and may force their way into the heart of Gray Valley.

Ye Chong spoke in a low voice, "Shang, show Gray Valley's star chart."

A star chart showing Gray Valley in the center leapt up into Muscle Man's holographic screen. Ye Chong studied the chart, and his heart sank even further.

Eastlight was the closest planet to the front line, and right behind it was Henna.

Chapter 484: Reaction

"Oh, by the way, Ye, just a moment ago, all the Research Consortium staff had left the training camp. This means that, as of now, we are the only ones left in the camp," Shang added lazily.

"They left?" Ye Chong raised a brow.

"Yes, they just got the news too. Ye, by tomorrow morning, probably the whole of Planet Henna will have known. If we're leaving, we gotta be quick. Remember to bring the students with you. Tsk tsk, can't be a commander without soldiers. Ah, the girl's here to see you." Just as Shang finished, Ye Chong noticed a mech approaching him.

Shen Ruxue landed her mech hastily, not far from Muscle Man. The students saw that the female instructor was here to see their instructor, and quickly gave way. Their instructor was a silent man, but a hero nonetheless, and it was only natural for a hero to have a beauty with him.

Shen Ruxue came out of her pilot cabin, looking nervous. Ye Chong came out of Muscle Man as well. Shen Ruxue quickly came forward and started clumsily, "Did you notice anything unusual in the camp?"

"What's unusual?" Ye Chong's face betrayed nothing.

"The staff are all gone, and I can't reach any of them. Something's not right, I think we might have a problem," Shen Ruxue said anxiously.

Ye Chong studied Shen Ruxue for a moment, and recalled Shang's words. Of course they were leaving Henna, it was only a matter of how. Leaving would require two things - a starship and defensive measures. The starship would be easy. If he worked together with Shang, hijacking a starship was a walk in the park. The problem now was securing their safety while they were

travelling. Planet Henna was surrounded by areas where red-tailed beasts were known to prowl. They would not survive the journey in outer space without enough defensive measures.

Ye Chong quickly made his decision. He would tell everything he knew to this woman. "The front line has collapsed in defeat. The Research Consortium staff have left."

Shen Ruxue turned pale. She saw that Ye Chong was not joking, and finally understood the situation they were all in.

Back in the training ground, 40 D-6's lined up in two neat formations. In front of them, 40 students stood in two groups of formation as well. Shen Ruxue stood beside Ye Chong, still in a daze. She was still trying to digest what Ye Chong had told her. Suddenly, she noticed something odd. Why would he be the first person she thought to ask? Could she have inadvertently acknowledged that this apathetic instructor of Group 25 to be stronger than her?

The 40 students noticed how they were two groups gathered in the same location, and did not understand what was going on.

Ye Chong looked at them all, and said plainly, "The front line has lost. The red-tailed beasts will reach here very soon. The Research Consortium staff have left. You have two hours to bring your families here. I will have an escape plan ready."

The 40 students stared blankly at Ye Chong as he looked to the watch on his wrist.

"The time is now 1420, meet up back here at 1620." His cold voice was devoid of emotion.

After that, Ye Chong said nothing more, showing only a serious expression.

Ye Chong's students looked to each other, then quickly climbed into their mechs and went their separate ways. They trust in their instructor, and besides, the recent behavior of the Consortium

staff had roused suspicious.

Shen Ruxue's students still looked shocked and doubtful. They exchanged looks, but none of them moved.

Shen Ruxue sighed to herself, and spoke up, "Everyone, go now. His words are true, let's not waste time."

Her students looked terrified, but quickly rushed to their mechs. Shen Ruxue had already been acknowledged by her students, winning their trust.

"Ye, these 20 students have to be drilled," Shang emphasised on the word "drilled".

Ye Chong assented. He understood what Shang meant. If these students failed to follow orders in future, it would be a big problem. Better to train them beforehand. However, time was something they were short of right now, so it would have to wait until after hijacking their means of escape.

Allowing the students to return and bring their families along was Shang's idea. Shang explained in detail to Ye Chong the reasoning behind it. There must be many family members for all these students, and it may seem like a larger burden on their escape plan. However, it was the only way to persuade the students to leave with him. Besides, if they encountered any danger, the students would naturally fight with all they got to protect their families. On the other hand, the starship was large enough to accommodate everyone with room to spare, requiring no further effort from Ye Chong.

Shang concluded that it was an all-benefits-and-no-harm bargain.

Ye Chong mused over his reasoning, realizing that there was a lot of thought put into this seemingly generous offer. Shang and Mu are truly very different!

"Let me reintroduce myself. I am Group 24's instructor, Shen

Ruxue. I think that we're going to be partners in the foreseeable future." Shen Ruxue finally composed herself, and realized that she did not know this instructor's name, only referring to him as Number 231. In fact, the Research Consortium did not require real names and information in order to be hired. This was a norm in Gray Valley. There were no countries in Gray Valley, and territorial boundaries were many and complicated. It was too easy to forge an identity.

"Jay!" Ye Chong replied to Shen Ruxue with his fake name that Shang had conjured up for him. Ye Chong did not feel guilty at all for lying about his name. It was becoming second nature.

Shen Ruxue asked straightforwardly, "Do you have a plan?"

Shen Ruxue's skin was tanned, probably due to prolonged outdoor activity. Her body was all muscles and no fat, and her fitting combat uniform traced her curves clearly. She had short and clear cut hair, a sharp chin and arching eyebrows. Upon closer inspection, he found that this female mech pilot actually refreshing, with perfectly balanced facial features.

The now calm Shen Ruxue looked honest and open, lacking the typical shyness found in other women. She smiled when she noticed Ye Chong's gaze on her, unannoyed by it. She could see that this Jay guy was not leering at her.

Ye Chong found himself impressed by her a little more. He had always been very choosy with his comrades. So far, the only ones that he acknowledged as comrades were Mu, Shang and Rui Bing.

Rui Bing ... That training garb, white as snow, the girl who sat high and straight ...

Ye Chong quickly gathered his thoughts and replied calmly, "I have many."

"Many?" Shen Ruxue looked surprised. She studied the reserved man beside her, and could not see anything unusual about him.

She was about to ask him some more when Jay closed his eyes and sat down. Shen Ruxue hesitated before joining him on the floor.

Ye Chong was conversing with Shang.

"Ye, I've checked all the starships in the docking zone. Today, there are a total of 125 starships scheduled for departure. 16 of them are large-sized starships. Six of these are already filled up with goods. Two of them carry maintenance parts, while the other four carry goods including energy cells. Our main options are these four starships."

Shang paused, unable to hide his excitement. He was always more interested in these kind of activities.

"These four starships are not too heavily guarded. However, the one called Haskel has the weakest security. Hence, this will be our main target."

Ye Chong listened closely, taking in every detail.

"Haskel will leave at 2250, but her crew will assemble at 1900. Our operation must be carried out before 1900. Ye, I will first hack into their control photon processor to take over their starship systems. I believe this operation will not too difficult for you, but there are a few things to keep in mind. To avoid causing any damage to the starship, I think it's better if you don't attack with mechs. Haskel's crew will keep the starship flying, so their safety is of the highest priority."

Ye Chong thought through Shang's plan and did not see any obvious holes. They decided to go ahead with the operation.

By then, some of the students had already returned with their families. Since they were brought to the training camp so abruptly, they looked mostly confused and afraid. The families discussed amongst themselves in bafflement. Most of them looked at Ye Chong doubtfully.

Xi Qing was from Crysound City, so he was the first to come

back. He brought not only his family members, but also his good friend White. White himself had no surviving family members since his parents died two years ago.

Xi Qing settled his family down before rushing back to Ye Chong, panting. White remembered Number 231 as a failed instructor, and could not believe that the front line had lost. He was only here because of his friend. In fact, he believed that all this trouble was some trick played by the failed instructor.

"Instructor, what do we do next?" He had hurried to and from his home, and could barely catch his breath. However, deep down, he was feeling excited. Shen Ruxue was now looking at Xi Qing.

Ye Chong opened his eyes, took a glance at Xi Qing, then dropped a bombshell, "We're hijacking a ship."

Chapter 485: Haskel

At dock, it was a lively sight. People were walking towards all directions. Everything was peaceful. Apparently the news of defeat had yet reached the ears of the folks. Spaceships, easily a thousand of them, came in different sizes, were parked at every empty lot at the docking zone. There were ships leaving while there were also ships that had just arrived from a long journey.

Ye Chong were leading his party, consisted of Xi Qing, White and two random trainees whose names were Zhao Gang and Shu respectively. The two trainees were the outstanding performers in the group other than Xi Qing. Zhao Gang was a brave fighter, a careful one too, while Shu was a rather strategic, situational fighter with a stern, cold personality. Three of them were the best students who had won over Ye Chong's trust with their capabilities.

Well, Ye Chong never knew he was actually educating his trainees. Having them in company would no doubt be a strategy to broaden their horizon while providing them opportunities to learn further about the world outside the classroom. Ye Chong did not intend to do that, he just felt their skills could mature faster, while being able to have a safer journey through this accompaniment.

Other than White, who looked confused and tensed, Xi Qing and Shu were looking calm. Zhao Gang was excited in the meantime.

Ye Chong, on the way to the docking zone, gave a briefing on the few dos and don'ts while stealing a ship. Yes, they were going to steal a spaceship. Nope, it was not proposed by Shang the evil genius but Ye Chong after a few thoughts himself. Ye Chong believed it was necessary to show these children the true, gruesome side of wars. They were calm and intelligent but they were still children who had never experienced wars, a dead-or-alive situation. And Ye Chong was well-aware of how the upcoming journey would impose peril on them. There could be

red-tailed beasts anywhere, there could also be pirates or any opportunistic robbers who eyed at their fragile appearance.

He had these four children with them, so they could have a careful look, a direct experience on what battles truly were. Well, there was not much risk to be frank, Ye Chong was capable to settle most dangers by himself, so it should be a golden opportunity for the children. Shang not only agreed but also was very much impressed at his idea.

Ye Chong's group of children did not catch any attention inside the decking zone. Soon they had already arrived by Haskel, the target this time.

It was a giant spaceship.

Thought the children when they spotted Haskel. Their faces were pale.

"Please don't tell me we are stealing this giant..." They looked at Ye Chong in utter doubts.

Stealing a gigantic spacecraft while there were only 5 of them? That was insane. It would be a game-over before Player 1 hit the gate!

The children thought they would be sneaking into a tiny, overlooked spaceship at one corner. But hell they were wrong.

Haskel was a spaceship with a length about 17.8 kilometers, categorized as Large in spaceship sizing. One could hardly see over 100 units of such model in Gray Valley, especially when half of them were under the consortium's examination.

Xi Qing could feel his tininess as he set his eyes upon the ship. The instructor almost sounded like a crackpot when he pointed at the ship. The plan felt bizarre to Xi Qing, as his heart raced. To be honest, he was pessimistic with the plan. It was clear that Haskel was under careful guard. There should be a kind of defense mechanism that would prevent intruders. It was certainly a fight

against the whale yet he did not retreat. The instructor might sound like a crackpot but he was a careful strategist. It must not be a wild plan coming from him. It was the trust that kept Xi Qing in line.

His lips cracked as he licked slowly. He had never conducted anything this exciting since he was birth. He looked at his mates whose gestures too had been stiffened by the electrifying thrill. The docking zone was busy. People were occupied by the loading schedule. No one bothered to lay even a glance at the strange group of children awkwardly lifting their steps.

They then shifted to a dark corner. Ye Chong looked at his trainees, "That, is Haskel. The target this time, just in case any of you was lost. There are 9 entrances. We would be infiltrating through the 7th entrance. Now, the important information. Listen, I would only say it once." Anticipation intensified as Ye Chong stared the children with his soulless eyes, "Act fast. No survivors."

What?

Xi Qing flinched. His horrified eyes looked back into the abyss of the instructor's eyes. He and his mates lowered their heads.

Was Xi Qing right on this? The instructor is indeed a real deal? A ferocious killer?

White was astonished.

Ye Chong turned away after giving his final command, with no spare time for the novices.

"Shang, how's the preparation?" asked Ye Chong.

"Done. Make your move~" said Shang in relaxation.

"Move!" He turned back to the children and urged them, before sprinting towards Haskel, with the children followed.

The 7th entrance was empty. There was nobody but the gate to

the corridor was shut.

How do we even get in there?

Xi Qing was very bewildered, as he observed the gate while they ran.

It was a gate with extremely, almost colossally thick armor, made out of probably a highly dense and strong alloy. No one could break in with brute's force while the instructor did not seem to be deploying his mech anytime soon. He just sprinted on.

They were approaching the gate, crashing soon. The instructor did not seem to be decelerating. Instead, he accelerated.

Were they going to do a meteor strike on the gate? The group was confused. At the next millisecond, the gate suddenly opened itself, as if connected to the instructor's will. The timing was impeccable.

The children's eyes were large.

Did the instructor make an "arrangement" beforehand?

Who is he?

That was when the children realized the monosyllabic instructor, who lived up to the action-speaks-louder-than-words spirit, could be a somebody.

But well, they had to steal a ship. No time for figuring that out at the moment.

The corridor was illuminated by the lamps at first. But it went out completely the moment they went in and heard a loud shout which shocked them.

"Who are you!?" Shouted from the interior, which a hmph, thump and dead silence followed. The children hesitated as their steps jerked, "Follow up!" Ordered the instructor ahead, which caused them to accelerate.

They then passed by a man passing out on the deck, with a distorted neck.

Oh the cruelty. The children was having cold sweat.

The instructor just moved on indifferently, which sent chills to their soul. They thought they knew their instructor, that maybe they had "tamed" him, but the horror returned. It was not because of his strength, but his indifference towards the dead, as if he once crawled out of the corpses and stood upon them after an apocalypse.

There were impression, fear and curiosity in their mind. A very complicated feelings they reckoned.

"FOCUS!" Frowned Ye Chong as he shouted and turned back as he ran.

The children went back to the reality and followed Ye Chong carefully.

Xi Qing was surprised that the instructor seemed extremely familiar with the layout of this ship. He did not have any form of reference with him, nor he ever got lost. He did not even look at the signs, or try checking out the rooms. And he had a shadow partner somewhere in the ship, who provided impeccable assistance.

As the instructor said, "Act fast. No survivors," the instructor was efficient in taking out his foes. The foes always collapsed before they could take any action. It was then Xi Qing was reminded of the instructor's insane brawling skills again. The most memorable one this time? He would say the battle of 1v12, which lasted only 48 seconds. None of the 12 men survived!

Dead bodies were everywhere, with distorted expression and anatomy. Blood painted the ground.

Xi Qing could feel his inside getting restless, and he heard White throwing up. It was a signal when he smelled the death. He finally could not hold the disgust wrenching his inside as he puked. Zhao Guo and Shu also halted and omitted.

Ye Chong stopped and looked at the trainees.

"Man, Ye, your students are weak," teased Shang.

"It's always the most unbearable the first time. They would do better the next." Replied Ye Chong.

"Well, if we have the next that is. To be honest, I am very much worried when we are having a bunch of kids in the team," said Shang.

"More is better than nothing," responded Ye Chong.

"Oh?" Flinched Shang, "Hahahah! You are right. It's still better than getting stuck here forever!" He seemed to have remembered something, "Oh yes, Ye, almost forgot, I need to open the air valve for you. The smell must be unbearable. These kids need to learn about hygiene, particularly the right spot to discharge their lunch, seriously, who else is going to take care of their mess after this?" Ranted Shang.

"It's alright," said Ye Chong. The smell was nothing compared to Trash Planet-12. He was used to that.

"The kiddos had done discharging. Ye, we need to catch the time," reminded Shang. The quicker they completed the operation, the less likely things would go wrong. Shen Ruxue was guarding the base at the moment and honestly both Ye Chong and Shang had little confidence in her capabilities.

"Mhm," said Ye Chong, as he looked at the children standing up after the overwhelming disgust, appearing pale.

Well Xi Qing felt better after throwing up, though fading fear lingered in his thoughts. He glanced at the instructor who still looked indifferent. His heart skipped a beat for a sudden, for some reason.

"Let's move, we are running out of time," said Ye Chong calmly as he began heading towards the gate with a password lock.

Chapter 486: Take Off

Once the algorithm exclusive to Gray Valley had been decoded, Mu/Shang the legendary top Maverick managed to demonstrate hacking to the gate. Within twinkling of eyes, Mu/Shang had seized the control of the entire spaceship. No one on the ship was able to discern the sudden change of ownership. Well, even if any of the sailors noticed the phenomena, Mu/Shang had full control of all sealing gates. None of these observant workers could leave their room.

And that was how Ye Chong leisurely cleared the deck.

In reality, he did not literally clear everything. Although he did have a complete list of these combative obstacles to knock down, he did not have the time. The news of defeat arrived Henna way faster than Shang had predicted, as he detected commotions in certain areas. And both Ye Chong and Shang were fairly convinced that it would only be a matter of time till the commotion reached every corner of the planet.

Other than the time left being insufficient, Ye Chong found the defense of the ship to be weak, too weak in fact. There were only a few teams of trainees patrolling on the ship, which was uncommon for a spaceship. He did weaken the defense further by taking out all the leaders but he seriously would not want to be welcomed with some unknown surprises hidden in the ship later. Well, still he had completed all the tasks for his plan. It took him and his vanilla apprentices an hour or so. Speaking of the vanillas, they had been drilled the bloodthirstiness and had started learning combats the true way.

They were superior but were still not a match to the adults singlehandedly. So they would fight in pairs, taking out enemies in a joint attack. That... was not exactly as efficient as one would have imagined. The shouts and punches lingered in the emptied vessel whenever Ye Chong cleared out every target in sight. Those

came from the hardworking trainees of his who were still handling two enemies in pairs. Ye Chong would not provide assistance. It would be a quick kill of not only enemies but also opportunity if he would. These living dummies would promote quick growth for his students. No doubt!

Haskel was chaotic, as the remaining crew realized they had lost control of all electronic units. The sealing gates were tightly sealed. So they were technically stuck, with their own fear as well as a land-mowing killing machine.

The indifferent young man and his 4 violent minions had shattered the security in the crew, as the pilots were smashed.

No one could stop the slaughterhouse, the pack of hungry wolves. The surviving crew was confused though, since it appeared that these attackers had a specific set of targets, that they spared the few crew members, as they walked the crew members by, as if the crew members never existed.

People were restless, as they awaited the deadly time. Never once they expected such a severe security breach, especially conducted by such barbarians. They were the fourth largest weapon supplier in Gray Valley and certainly they spoke louder compared to the folks on the street. No organization would want to mess with them. Gangsters? They ran away before the safety pin was even pulled from the grenade. And the irony? Despite the weaponry and authority they gained from it, their fate was going to be determined by a few young men raiding their ship.

Beep That was when every single screen of their communicators shone.

"Fellow crewmen, I believe all of you are fully aware of what had just happened to your ship. I'm sorry but the ship now has switched its owners. All existing contracts would have their ownership transferred to the new boss of Haskel. Should you have any 'inquiry', just ask, you have all the rights to do so.

Hehehehe..." The rascal voice rang like a blizzard upon their back. There was a pause, then the rascal voice continued, "As all of you had done a great work, there won't be any reformation necessary, we would take off in 2 hours. Be prepared or the consequences might be ... undesirable. Hmmm, hah! Don't be afraid, you'll be ever safer than ever as long as you do your works right. You have me on your side, well except if you want to switch side, then I'll..." The threat was clear in this one.

Tick And the screen turned off. Silence returned.

The crew members were looking confused, at a loss of idea on where to start at first. But that realization came simultaneously on each of them that they jerked, as if gotten electrocuted, and began walking around getting into position. They were unaware of the hijacker but they were fully informed of what bloodshed the hijacker had created outside, and they absolutely would not want another bloodshed to happen.

The leaders had been slaughtered. The crew members, the pawns remained in the field and they should be doing what pawns were supposed to do.

...

"Phew." Ye Chong let out a sigh of relief after securing the ownership of the ship with Shang. He might have a long health bar, but after so long he still got tired. His students, Xi Qing and the rest had already blended with the floor after collapsing.

Although they looked dead tired, Ye Chong insisted them to pilot a miniature vessel to escort the other trainees and their families.

Another hour lapsed in the process. Out of the 40 trainees, only 33 came. The 7 missing trainees? They were from Shen Ruxue's group. So, it was naturally justified. Everyone dropped their jaws upon seeing the gigantic Haskel. They could not imagine how Ye Chong hijacked the entire ship with only 5 of them.

The trainees were astonished in the beginning, but excitement soon colored their expression. It was a dream-came-true for most of them to be able to fight on a such a giant spaceship.

Shang had made the arrangement. So there were sailors to lead them to the accommodation.

Right after the newly joined passengers settled down, the screen was turned on again.

It was a projection of the entire pathway, towards which crowds were flooding. Noises, screams, of fear and agitation could be heard. The crew members held their steps as they looked upon the screen, again bewildered of the happening.

What happened?

"I believe you have seen what was going on the screen. I hereby inform all of you a bad news. The front-line had fallen. The alliance had lost. And by that I also believe you all should know what it means." Said Shang, as the visuals changed rhythmically, of every corner of the largest city on Henna where citizens were frantically scurrying everywhere.

It was hell on Henna.

It was dead silent in Haskel.

"This place has already been turned to hell and very likely most of the residents would not be able to escape this. Any form of migration, evacuation, transfer would not be possible." The tone was cold, so cold that it ached the crew members.

"There is no time for sentiment. All of you are not in a position to do that yet. Now, think of your fate ... and fight for it. Think of your family, your wife, your children. If you want to die right here and right now, then so be it. But what would happen to them? What would be their fate? Would they even have a future? No, save the thinking. You don't need to think about that. All you need to think is to live. Yes, to live. We just need to live. But what could

guarantee our living? The armor of Haskel? The weapon of hers? No. It's your contribution! Every bit of your strength and every ounce of your courage, to fight for the next break of dawn." It came flatly yet it struck every single crew member in the room.

Ye Chong was rather impressed by Shang for he was able to raise the will in the people with simply a few words.

"Ye, we are going to fly. We have to depart now or we might crash into other spaceships," suggested Shang. He was right, the pathway was already chaotic. There was no longer anything recognizable as traffic. They got to force their way into the space.

"Mhm, let's go," nodded Ye Chong.

"All crew member, prepare for departure." The order was passed and soon they could hear the loud buzzes made by the heating engine, along with the cracks of the unmoved crates once laid next to it.

Haskel was departing, as gradually the ship left the ground.

Passengers, sailors, their eyes upon the crowding citizens in most fear on the ground. There was sentiment but there was also no time. They should not be sentiment as they could not even guarantee their own tomorrow either. They were glad for being able to leave Henna safely, while they also worried their upcoming fate.

As they bade a silent farewell to Henna with a heavy heart, Ye Chong and Shang were having discussion.

"Ye, what makes you think that?" Shang was rather curious. It was a pretty creative idea from Ye Chong.

"I dunno. It just came to my mind somehow."

"If you want to do that, we got to do it now," muttered Shang. "It'll be a major operation you know?"

"Right," Ye Chong nodded, "We do not have much time left. At

least it'll be unlikely to encounter any red-tailed beast in the nearest course around."

"Wowie, Ye, you actually turned smart," Shang chuckled. "Well, let me take here for you. According to your plan you'll need to reform the combat units on the ship or it'll be pointless even if we managed to accomplish your brilliant idea."

"Okay," responded Ye Chong, without a doubt. He headed to his trainees.

Time is gold.

No one should understand the meaning of this proverb better than them right now.

Chapter 487: Preparation

Bach was the top person in charge of the maintenance department in Haskel. He was known for his giant, glaring, bloodshot eyes as well as his thundering, eardrum-rupturing mortal howl, "Move harder, punks! The captain did not pay for you sissies to tell me things won't work! Hurry up! We have a long pier of reinforcement to do, yes? What, impossible? What did I say just now?" The scowl was twitching, "Make it possible!" Father Bach, or maybe more fashionably, Daddy Bach, was in his blue collared uniform tainted by the last few continuous days of work, he had not been sleeping ever since. Stain of oils were over his body, his hair was tussling, the red eyes intensified.

This was the third day in a row.

It almost felt like a dream, of an endless war.

Everything felt so unreal to him but the senses had convinced him. For starters, the ship which he had been serving for almost five years got hijacked, without a single forewarning. It felt as if the hijacker hacked in and assassinated everyone. The following news was utterly earth-shattering even for an experienced sailor like him - the frontline had failed, the army had been defeated. He believed nobody on the ship would buy the news if it was not the broadcast by the new captain. They would not be foolish enough to even approach Henna if they ever foresaw this.

It did not make sense however. How would it be possible for the frontline to crumble simply without a sign? There were a large flock of pilots, in their formidable mechs guarding the galactic boundary, "Or we are indeed fighting against monstrosity this time, that we could not hold it back?" he muttered in bewilderment.

He was at loss of hope upon hearing the news. Disbelief, confusion, frustration flooded his mind, till the hijacker voiced

motivation which flushed all those away, that he realized, "Yes, he is right, I could not just stop here. I have things I would fight for." Thought he, reminiscing the mischievous, innocent giggle and smile of his granddaughter. "I am not saying goodbye to my granddaughter." And the old workman felt all pumped again, "Not just yet."

As ordered he sprinted back to his work station, only to receive a detailed proposal of heavy modification from the new "captain".

Certainly, Father Bach recognized the entire purpose of this modification at first glance. He had been in lead of ship maintenances since 20 years ago. "Alright sir." And he accepted the proposal promptly, without hesitation and paying attention to the hideous deadline creeping behind the page.

"All workmen, gather up!" He called upon all members and made the arrangement right away. His charisma had won over the respect of his men and they were fairly informed of how this operation could determine their survival, thus the hard work, the overwork. Father Bach could not remember the last time he had even a forty winks, the corners of his lips were getting blisters from the constant friction out of restlessness.

"Hurry! Right there, strengthening."

"Someone, I want something welded here right now. It's not sturdy enough."

The hoarse voice echoed within the spaceship.

...(Meanwhile)...

Ye Chong was as busy as a bee too. He was racing with time as he had to gather up as many pilots as possible and he managed to get 177 of them eventually. It was a figure within his expectation but he was not entirely confident of this force. Only if he had the Sangs, then he probably would need a mere 50 of them to keep the journey safe.

Well it was not the time for him to sigh over his bad luck. He had works to do. He had to train these pilots, which a majority of them was ranged attackers.

He did not intend to shuffle the whole force with his 20 trainees. The trainees had founded a considerably impeccable rapport with each other. It would only weaken his trainees if he broke them up. They should not impose a major issue, unlike these new pilots. He did not expect much from these pilots.

But he had to recognize the fact that these pilots were far more experienced than his trainees, at least they had fought in a war field, not inside a classroom. Similar to the trainees, these pilots had a kind of bond among themselves, so a formation could be discerned whenever they engaged in battles. Well, that left Ye Chong with the basic patch works then. It sounded easy but not as effortless as one imagined. These pilots had a formation and the formation was probably drilled deep into their head. It would be a chore to alter it.

He needed assistance. So he called Shang. His plan was simple. He would first torture them with hands-on fights again and again, then Shang would point out their mistakes in replays of various angles. It was rather fortunate that these pilots were very much aware of their life-dead situation, so they worked diligently. They were changing. Their attack patterns were changing, but not up to Ye Chong's standard. No doubt these pilots would defeat his trainees in a one-on-one, but it would be a different story if they were in a five-on-five.

...

"Captain. We have received an alliance request from ships nearby," announced a crewman, as in the projection several spaceships had just left Henna clumsily. The crewman was not clear of the new captain's identity. He seemed... pretty mysterious since the crew members had never seen him in person, not even in corridors but somehow he seemingly knew everything that

happened in the ship. It felt creepy at first, since it almost felt like there was a pair of eyes following them everywhere, watching them all the time. However it was only a matter of time till they got used of being monitored. The new captain was very charismatic, as well as capable. Well, sailors were simple beings, as long as one could provide them the safety, the identity and creepiness were no longer an issue.

"I see. Ignore them. We are at a different course anyway," rang the voice of Shang next to the crewman's ears.

Regarding their big runaway with children, both Ye Chong and Shang had a long discussion. With reference to Shang's collection of information he detected in the surrounding, they eventually came into an agreement to land on Duodania, a planet near the pathway to He Yue galaxy. A few factors came into their consideration. First off, stability. The pathway was obviously guarded by a large troop which could provide them security. Compared to the red-tailed monsters from another dimension, humans were at least something whom Shang and Ye Chong could reason with words. Second and most importantly, opportunity. Assuming one day the red-tailed beasts had invaded the area, the guard would be dispersed and that would be when they got the best opportunity to run all the way back to He Yue galaxy again.

"Course change! According to new coordinate!"

Haskel made a turn and exited the orbit that those spaceships travelled, heading to Duodania.

On their way there, they could sometimes see spaceships of various sizes, coming from behind, frantically heading towards all sorts of directions at full speed. Within only a few days, the news of the crumbled frontline had reached the entire Gray Valley, stirring up fright in people. Haskel was advancing at highest velocity too. No one other than Ye Chong and Shang knew how fast those terrifying monsters would reach the ship, so their blood was boiling the whole time, fearing of missing that one important

split second of their life.

"W...we are finally done." Whispered Bach, with his reddened eyes looking at the fully transfigured spaceship in relief. It took the team days and nights to finish the modification. Luckily they were supplied with sufficient materials as well as masterly craftsmen.

"T-tell the cap-" And Father Bach had fallen into slumber. "Father Bach!" Shouted one man as he quickly went to grab the collapsing old man with the others.

BEEP

BEEP

"Emergency. Emergency. All combat units into position now. All combat units into position now. Non-combat units please evacuate to safety. Non-combat units please evacuate to safety." Wailed the alarm.

Ye Chong had returned to the captain's room, where a giant holographic screen was there, displaying 28 red-tailed beasts charging towards them.

The crew members were shaking in the captain's room. Their faces were pale. They had heard of the monster before, and they once thought they were mentally prepared for it, but the stress was too overwhelming in actuality.

"Everything's done?" asked Ye Chong to Shang.

"Jajajaja, we just finished, Ye. Looks like the Lady Luck is on our side today."

"Mhm, okay, I'll be going. Ask the crewman to send the things to Exit No.13," said Ye Chong as he left the room.

All combat units were already in their respective position, with anticipation searing their patience.

Ye Chong walked up to these pilots, with his eternal indifference in his staring eyes, he said, "I know all of you are probably afraid of

what is ahead. But it is pointless to be afraid. There is no time to act afraid. There is no way back now." A moment of silence lapsed, as if he was building up for the ultimate command, "Either we or the monsters are going down today."

Ye Chong was not a born motivator but he did feel a need to say something. So he did.

Well, contrary to his expectation, that one random line worked pretty well among the pilots, as he could see the worries fading on their faces. They looked steadier by then.

"Follow me," said Ye Chong, heading towards Exit No.1.

The 13th exit was the smallest pathway of the entire ship, with a mere diameter of 30 meters, initially meant for the safe boats.

But the exit looked totally different to the folks today, as they were welcomed by broad, reinforced metallic bars, a dense arrangement of them. These bars looked so sturdy that it should not bulge even when a mech crashed into it at full speed. The exit had appeared much narrower than before. Well it took an expanding design, where the point where they were standing was the narrowest and the pathway would open up as they travel.

"This, would be our battlefield," said Ye Chong, which confused the folks.

"What did he say?" There were whispers.

"Group of 5. On shifts. Watch on your formation and strategies." That was when they realized the meaning of the design. With such space, only 5 mechs could fight at the same time. And the narrowing pathway would help "filter" the raiding beasts to a more manageable amount. That explained all the reinforced metallic bars.

So that was Ye Chong's plan.

The catch was... how Ye Chong would be keeping the beasts busy here? How would he ensure that the beasts would only be

intruding from here? Given that the beasts could be smart enough to launch a full attack over every corner of the ship, the plan would fail immediately.

"R-r-r-reporting. The batteries are here, s-sir," said one crew member, his voice trembling in anxiety.

Ye Chong responded with a nod, gesturing them to leave. It felt like amnesty for the members that they fled the scene like a free bird.

So there were over hundred fully charged batteries piling up behind them.

"Battle station," said their leader, in a firm voice.

Chapter 488: Maiden Battle

Five D-6's quickly took their positions. Xi Qing was in the squad assigned as their first line of defense. The other students were also in their mechs, acting as backup. Ye Chong was in Muscle Man.

Swish! The alloy door behind them shut close. Next, the hatch for Passage 13 opened up. The corridor lost its atmosphere as air rapidly escaped outwards. However, the people were unaffected, held in place by the starship's artificial gravity.

The passageway was long, and it was dark outside, in outer space. They waited anxiously for the red-tailed beasts to arrive.

While they could not understand how their instructor was so certain that the creatures would come this way, they prepared themselves nonetheless.

"Get ready!" The instructor's voice came through their comms, his low voice magically calming their hearts.

The passageway darkened, and all five mechs took a step forward.

Three red-tailed beasts entered the passageway in a straight line, moving quickly.

Xi Qing understood his role in their first line of defense. As the leader of his squad, he must be the main attacker. He was at the front of the squad, the most dangerous position.

They were fast! Even though they were informed earlier, the speed of these creatures still surprised him. The creatures were over 10 meters tall, with crimson red eyes and a tail with a red tip that trailed behind them like an asteroid. Xi Qing had seen them before on the news many times, but it was still fearfully choked now that he was facing them in the flesh.

He did not panic, however. No longer was he the young freshie that he used to be. Even with just one time of real life combat

experience, he was now more mature than many of his peers. His D-6 lowered itself and crossed its two weapons, forming a blocking motion. He did not guard his flanks, since his comrades would. His instructor had told them that once their partners were with them, they should be trusted. He remembered this well enough.

Klang! A strong blow landed on the two curved blades as Xi Qing's mech was pushed behind, but he managed to slow down his opponent at the same time. Everyone there knew the power of a high speed attack. Only when the red-tailed beasts slow down would his comrades have a chance.

In that moment, the two D-6's beside Xi Qing lunged forward towards the attacking red-tailed beast, slowed down by Xi Qing. They restrained the creature from attacking Xi Qing.

The other two red-tailed beasts slowed down as well, hindered by the first one in the front. The passageway was too narrow for them to take advantage of their agility.

Ye Chong had chosen this battleground after much thought. The red-tailed beasts could move far more deftly than mechs. If it was too spacious, the students would face a very challenging fight. Ye Chong himself had experienced it first hand. In the narrow passageway, the red-tailed beasts would not be able to make full use of this advantage. It would be a battle of brute force. A mech's exterior were more durable than the skin of a red-tailed beast. So long as no vulnerable parts were hit, the mech could be repaired and ready for the next battle.

The narrow terrain could not fit in too many mechs and red-tailed beasts together. Besides, Ye Chong did not have enough manpower anyway. This would allow them to survive longer.

On the other hand, once Passage 13 was under their control, they could sever communications between the red-tailed beasts within and outside of the passageway since Passage 13 was heavily fortified.

There was also another important detail. There was artificial gravity inside the starship, unlike the floating sensation in outer space. This meant that Ye Chong could join in the fight with Muscle Man. Muscle Man could only fight on the ground, a disadvantage that Ye Chong was painfully aware of. However, he dared not use Han Jia. Han Jia had many small cracks on it. Using the mech without prior maintenance would very likely open the cracks even wider. Ye Chong did not know if Gray Valley had any skeletal material, but to find skeletal material of the quality found in Archipelago would almost definitely be impossible. Besides, Ye Chong had spent so much time training with Muscle Man. It felt like a waste if he could not use it. He knew that the students were still greenhorns, and those mech pilots could barely contribute to the fight. This made him the strongest combat personnel they had. It was one of the reasons Ye Chong thought of this brilliant idea. Passage 13 was not the only passageway that was modified.

To make the red-tailed beasts enter Passage 13 obediently, Ye Chong had stored a large amount of energy cells behind him. He knew that these terrifying creatures craved for pure energy. The six-fingered red-tailed beast that he pursued some time ago seemed to be able to sense energy ores in rocks. Ye Chong was not sure if these normal red-tailed beasts would be just as sensitive, but now it looked like it was working.

In the battleground, three red-tailed beasts and five mechs were deep in their fight. The hatch behind the red-tailed beasts was closed. In other words, the creatures were trapped inside. Despite that, no one relaxed. The three red-tailed beasts fought powerfully as they tried to break through the surrounding formation of the five mechs in quick, agile movements. The red-tipped tails hit violently against the mechs' weapons, a scary sight for the mech pilots who were watching from outside the fight. However, these five mechs managed to keep the three red-tailed beasts contained throughout it all.

From their initial awkwardness, these five mechs were now beginning to get the hang of the battle. While they were initially overpowered, now they could force the battle into a stalemate. Xi Qing was still the main attacker while the other D-6's covered him, trading places as they made sure each red-tailed beast was at least engaged by two mechs at a time.

Ye Chong watched the battle, quietly approving of his students. He could see that Xi Qing was already in the flow of the battle. Ye Chong recognized him as a talent, had spent more time on him than the other students and offered him more guidance.

Xi Qing fought with simple but effective moves, almost like Ye Chong. While he was the main assault member, he was also the squad's leader. This required him to see the bigger picture of the battle. Now, he was doing just that competently.

He used the advantage of his role as main attacker to move around freely, and swapped places with the four mechs as required. He did not target any particular red-tailed beast, but instead continued to distribute their attacks equally on all three of the creatures. He led outstandingly, allowing his squad members to coordinate smoothly with each other and press on their enemies with their numbers.

With this, they slowly turned the tables and gained the upper hand. The red-tailed beasts seemed to notice that the hatch behind them was shut, and began to look nervous. The way they looked at the energy cells longingly was noticed by Ye Chong.

The battle was beginning to be favor Xi Qing and his squad.

The battle situation was unexpected. The red-tailed beasts were rumored to be very strong, and the fact the frontline was defeated made these creatures look even more intimidating. Now, however, they looked like they were only about as strong as some advanced mech pilot. Could the rumors be mistaken? Then why would be the soldiers at the frontline lose? Or was it because the combat

strategy that their instructor taught them was too good?

The young mech pilots could not help but steal a glance at the clumsy Muscle Man. Muscle Man held his position steadily like an unmovable mountain. The cold, bulky machine looked lifeless. The pilot within did not seem inclined to get involved in the fight.

The five mechs fought with growing momentum, while the three red-tailed beasts were starting to panic.

Xi Qing's D-6 suddenly came out of its safe position amongst the other four mechs. It twisted around to the back of one of the red-tailed beasts engaged with two D-6's and struck out with its two curved blades towards the creature.

Blood splattered. An X-shaped wound was carved into the back of the red-tailed beast. The creature froze in pain, and the two mechs engaging it took the opening. Four curved blades came for the red-tailed beast from four odd angles. The creature tried to avoid them, but was still cut open on its left shoulder. It froze again in pain, and this when its throat was fully exposed for Xi Qing.

Xi Qing recognized the opportunity. He maneuvered his mech calmly, driving the curved blade in his hand towards the creature's throat!

Blood sprayed out like a blooming flower. With his target eliminated, Xi Qing ignored the red-tailed beast that was now crumpling down backwards and head towards the other four mechs.

The other two red-tailed beasts flared as they saw their companion killed, and dashed towards Xi Qing, trying to stop him from returning to the protection of his comrades.

However, just as they moved, four blades glimmered coldly before them, and stopped them in their tracks. Two of the mechs had seen Xi Qing in danger and came forward to assist.

With that, Xi Qing returned to his squad.

As he reunited with his squad, Xi Qing quickly slipped behind two of the D-6's. His own D-6 moved behind and between the two mechs, taking his position per their strategy. As Xi Qing moved, the other two mechs adjusted their positions, going into proper formation.

It all happened so quickly, but it was also the turning point of the battle. Under Xi Qing's leadership, the remaining two red-tailed beasts were handled steadily by the five D-6's without rushing their attacks. With one red-tailed beast down, the other two soon failed to defend themselves, and died one after the other under the attacks of the five mechs.

The five students had killed three red-tailed beasts!

Five students had killed three red-tailed beasts, without incurring a single casualty - this was something that happened right before everyone's eyes, but it still felt like a dream, impossible to believe. For the moment, everyone felt a little uncertain.

Chapter 489: Along the Way

Ye Chong looked gloomy.

The first battle under Xi Qing's lead had gone perfectly, but this perfect first time also came at a high price. Because Xi Qing's squad had performed wonderfully, the other mech pilots began to underestimate the red-tailed beasts.

However, this incorrect supposition was quickly overturned!

The second squad fought against three red-tailed beasts as well, and four of the squad were injured in combat. Had Ye Chong not stepped in to help, they would have all lost their lives. Even so, the four of them received significant injuries. Fortunately, Haskel had medical equipment onboard, even though it would still take 10 days for them to fully recuperate.

The wake-up call once again reminded everyone of how dangerous the red-tailed beasts were.

There were no more casualties in later battles, but Ye Chong still looked gloomy. His combat power came not from the adult mech pilots, but from his very own 20 students. Those were his capable fighters. However, four of them were injured.

These 20 students had formed squads of five, so it meant that Ye Chong had just lost one out of four combat squads. What's more, it was a loss that could have been avoided. Ye Chong had planned meticulously to create this strategic environment to reduce the natural advantages of the red-tailed beasts. Hence, he could not help but feel let down that he had lost a squad so soon into their journey.

"Ye, don't worry too much. They'll be good as new in just 10 days," Shang offered a rare consolation.

"Alright," Ye Chong replied.

Shang did not seem to notice Ye Chong's mood as he declared

excitedly, "Ye, today's battle proved that your method works. As long as we keep this up, it shouldn't be a problem."

Ye Chong quickly composed himself and corrected Shang, "You mean, if we don't encounter any large groups of red-tailed beasts."

"I suppose you're right," Shang mused, "If we encounter a larger group of them, then we're screwed. However, if our deductions are correct, the odds are in our favor."

Ye Chong and Shang had done extensive analysis when deciding on their flight course, and had chosen their current route in the end. It was not the fastest route, but their calculations suggested that it was the one with the lowest chance of encountering large groups of red-tailed beasts.

Killing more than 20 red-tailed beasts was a feat that raised the morale of everyone on the starship. The crew all looked hopeful and energetic.

Now, the crew discussed mostly about the brilliant ways in which the students defeated the creatures. The four casualties that Ye Chong thought avoidable was ignored in these discussions. To them, four casualties and none dead were definitely a good outcome in killing off 28 red-tailed beasts. Where before they had felt hopeless against the mysterious creatures, now they allowed themselves to be optimistic.

Even the mech pilots who did not participate in the battles were encouraged. The red-tailed beasts were not invincible. They knew this now as fact. With this glimmer of hope, they began to train themselves even more.

They realized that the students won against the red-tailed beasts because of their unique coordination strategies. That would be their key to survival. Recognizing this, they began to train in earnest, even without Ye Chong's reminder.

The maintenance crew got busier and busier. They would have to

fix all the mechs that were damaged from the daily trainings. These mechs would be returned again and again to the maintenance section due to the trainings. To avoid interrupting their training sessions, the maintenance crew worked diligently without complaint.

The entire starship was filled with enthusiasm! The desire to live, whether courageously or cowardly, had never been too different.

Xiao Wan looked tired. In front of her was Arwa. The genius tactician had lost a lot of weight, but he was still in high spirits.

Arwa had a sense of foreboding about the war, but in the end, the United Army had been defeated quite decisively. The man was famed for his tactical skills, but he was ignored by all the higher ups back then. No one had listened to him.

The unprecedented loss ended with about one third of Gray Valley's combatants losing their lives in the purple gas cloud.

Arwa had been acting cautiously since the beginning of the war, and his caution paid off. He recognized the situation for what it was, and quickly made adjustments. By then, they were already surrounded by red-tailed beasts.

These creatures were intelligent - they could plan ahead! Arwa realized this with shock. Was it a coincidence, or had the creatures been waiting for this moment? Without more time to consider it further, Arwa decided it must be the latter!

Arwa was none other than Gray Valley's number one tactical genius! In the moment where death seemed to close in, he calmed himself down and made a series of adjustments. In retrospect, his adjustments were wise. Just when they were all surrounded, Arwa's adjustments had allowed them to break through the creatures and escape.

The 1st Platoon was destroyed. Commander of the 1st Platoon,

the infamous Guang Bei, was lost in the war.

Only 200 mechs survived and escaped. It was a terrifying and ghastly aftermath. After escaping, Arwa immediately brought his 200 mechs to their base and the Young Miss, began their retreat.

Arwa came from a poor neighbourhood, and had endured through countless difficulties since his childhood to become the tough person he was today. Despite their great defeat, he did not lose his bearings, but handled it competently as he always did.

His only concern was the Young Miss. This defeat was too heavy a blow on her. She was regretful, ashamed, pained, lost ... All these emotions haunted her, and she looked more withered every day. Arwa may be a genius, but even he could not help her. He could only do his best to protect the Young Miss until she recovered.

Fortunately, his subordinates were all trustworthy, and his last desperate attempt had led to their survival. They were all very grateful for him, and obeyed his orders to the letter.

Much to everyone's surprise, Arwa decided not to stay at headquarters, but instead stole a midsized starship from there and head towards Duodania. Arwa had his reasons. Headquarters was not close to the frontline, and the bulk of the red-tailed beasts would probably reach there very soon. Even if they did not arrive, the base was no longer save. Their meager number of combatants would not be enough to defend the place. Even without the threat of the red-tailed beasts, ambitious local organizations would be enough to overwhelm them.

In the bigger picture, Arwa believed that Gray Valley would ultimately be lost to the red-tailed beasts. Gray Valley was no longer an option. It was better for them to leave now. He had the same idea as Ye Chong - with security at the Gateway laxing, he and his men would be able to enter He Yue Galaxy unnoticed. Together, they would be able to reform the Xiao Family's army.

What he was worried about was the Young Miss. She had fainted

the moment she heard of the news of their defeat. When she came to, she was filled with despair, and continued to behave passively so far.

Ye Chong had already encountered a few small groups of red-tailed beasts. They never have more than 30 of them in each group. The number of casualties had gone up to nine, but they were mostly Shen Ruxue's students or Haskel's mech pilots.

Luring the red-tailed beasts into the narrow passageways with energy cells, shutting the hatch, then killing off the red-tailed beasts with their acquired advantages - this was a combat strategy that everyone had gotten used to in the past few days. They were getting more efficient in it. Everyone had participated in at least one of the battles against the red-tailed beasts. Even Shen Ruxue fought against the creatures herself. These experiences had improved their strength over time.

However, they were also no longer feeling optimistic. The red-tailed beasts were appearing more and more frequently. Once, they encountered two groups of red-tailed beasts in the same day. It was only when Ye Chong entered the fight himself, killing seven red-tailed beasts with Muscle Man that the tension in the air was slightly relieved. Ye Chong's combat prowess had astounded all the other mech pilots.

Haskel's combat ability had also gathered the attention of many others. Many starships that they encountered along the way were impressed by Haskel's defenses, and stayed close to the ship. In just a short time, Haskel became surrounded by a good variety of starships. There were small and midsize starships, transport ships, and even a midsize warship. The warship was fitted with menacing looking cannons, but they only managed to look powerless. Here was a gathering of all kinds of random starships.

They relied on Haskel for protection. Whenever the red-tailed

beasts appear, they would slip behind the ship's hull. Only when Haskell had killed all the creatures would they slowly return to their positions around the starship.

Annoyingly, the number of starships around Haskell was growing rapidly. Each day saw a few more starships joining the fray. There were now three warships with Haskell. Most of the starships were civilian class, without any firepower or resources Ye Chong and group could use. The warships looked threatening enough, but were powerless against the red-tailed beasts.

It was real predicament, dealing with these starships!

"Shang should worry about this!" Ye Chong thought as he headed towards the training ground.

Chapter 490: Let's Be Heroes Today Onwards!

Meanwhile, Arwa was also very puzzled of the same problem.

He did manage to break free from the siege of the monsters with his 200 pilots who were certainly the top 200 he could ever imagine commanding. They encountered a few unaccompanied red-tailed beasts on their way but none of these beasts imposed an issue as they would strike the beasts down before anything else. There were tiny flock of wandering spaceships that witnessed the scene and decided to join them without hesitation. As the knightly mighty army of Arwa struck down more beasts, there seemed to be more spaceships tailing them as well...

It should not go out of hand this fast under normal circumstance but it was that one slip of tongue of Arwa's man that reacted vigorously among the wandering spaceships from all corners. "My lord Arwa, he... uh.. opps..."

It was as if there was a light of hope when the spaceships realized the owner of the leading spaceship was no one other than the greatest strategist, Arwa himself. The fleet was growing rapidly, which could be a little issue for Arwa.

But can I just abandon these folks? No... If I do... my name would be...

If I took them? I don't think I could protect all of them, we are slowing down too...

Arwa was facing a dilemma.

The young mistress had not recovered from the last shock, her eyes were soulless and that was something to worry.

...(Meanwhile)...

"Are you sure?" said Ye Chong, bewildered as his eyes set upon

the list of supplies in his hand. He could not perceive the motive of Shang's decision.

"I just got a really bad news," said Shang slowly, "The pathway to He Yue galaxy has already been engulfed by the red-tailed beasts. Although I still could not identify from where they came, I highly suspect these were the red-tailed beasts from He Yue galaxy itself."

"He Yue's own variation?" flinched Ye Chong.

"Mhm," Shang responded grimly, "I had simulated several calculations yet there is no plausible way that the red-tailed beasts could reach the pathway when they were far behind us. So where did these beasts come from? The first possibility is that they had infiltrated in small batches since the time before; The second... the pathway had received severe attacks from the galaxy itself. The second seems more probable by the way."

Ye Chong nodded, as he remembered the few red spots on Ye Luo's intergalactic layout. In an approving tone he replied, "There are several potential spawning locations of the red-tailed beasts in He Yue. So it is indeed likelier for the second assumption."

"Thus my current proposition would be to sail slowly. We would make use of the time to reform our force, so that we could at least attempt to force our way in even if no opening could be found when we arrived," said Shang proudly.

"Force?" Ye Chong gave a raise of brows as he waved the list in his hand, "By force, you meant them?" Haskel had been followed by over 300 spaceships. It was already a gigantic fleet. Even if they pretended each ship was carrying passengers of a mere number of 300, they would have achieved 100,000 easily with this fleet.

"Well, the likelihood of us returning to He Yue galaxy is pretty low, at least in short terms. So I believed it would be better if we have a paradigm shift. We could make use of the force we have. You might think it mostly consists of citizens who could hardly hurt a fly, but I must remind you to not look down upon them.

There could be talents hidden among them. To craft diamonds one must always start from the filthy ores. We have ample time to train a batch of pilots. These citizens should have sufficient foundation to be trained. So our only problem would be time. As long as we did not come into a large flock of red-tails beasts, then we would be spared on time. And we would no longer have nothing in our hands. We can go anywhere we want once we got the strength. And so, we fight. We would fight."

Ye Chong was astounded of this strange sensation in his mind. He seemingly was no longer speaking to a handicapped artificial indulgence. It was as if he was speaking to a hero, one with ambition, a wild ambition and intrepid wishes.

Could this be Shang in the past? Is this how he once was?

"Jajaja~ Ye, good news. Mu has permitted my plan. So I'll be staying on manifestation till we got back to He Yue galaxy, unless something happened which is unlikely under my intelligence." Shang did not seem to notice Ye Chong's expression.

"Shang, how did you come to this plan?" asked Ye Chong.

"HAH!" The artificial indulgence was proud, "Told you to watch more movies! Yet every time you turned a deaf ear to my advice! It took me a long time to formulate this master plan with reference to 180 well-known film productions of the mafia genre as well as the heroes making histories. See? You were impressed by my idea too. Were you not? Hahahahahahaha!"

Ye Chong felt a strong nostalgia filling his heart upon hearing the uncontrolled laugh of this artificial indulgence.

He is still the Shang I knew.

"Well then, let's be heroes today onwards!" smiled Ye Chong.

Shang was immediately stupefied as the beeping chuckle stopped.

...(On the other side of the galaxy)...

Yang Ming marched to the captain's room, he wanted to respond to the message. Well, the captain was his uncle and technically every single man and woman inside the ship was his family. Including the other 5 spaceships nearby, they were all Yangs. The Yang family was a mere small tribe which consisted a population of barely over 2000.

They performed a migration upon a prompt decision of the chief since the hearing of the frontline collapse, and they were in this fleet at the moment considering how it might be safer hiding themselves in a massive crowd. Yang Ming thought it was a standard crowd without hierarchy at first, but he realized how there was one single ship leading them silently.

It was a gigantic model named Haskel.

And after the first encounter with the red-tailed beasts, he finally knew how Haskel managed to be ahead of all ships. Haskel was not only a leader, but also a guardian!

He was presented with the formidability of the ship's forces. The red-tailed beasts came in one wave and another and somehow Haskel was able to attract them like a powerful magnet while swallowing all of them in one go. No beast had left the ship ever since they got in.

It was a mystery in Yang Ming's eyes.

So where are they from? Which forces do they belong? What is the motive?

Questions mushroomed in the head of Yang Ming yet he had no way to answer them. Haskel was the silent one, like the angel who would escort the fleet to salvation. On the other hand, the followers were noisier as they would exchange information at least once a day. There was once they mentioned about Haskel and one of them claimed that Haskel belonged to a military group.

There were speculations but surely they could confirm that

Haskel was strong!

And today was different.

All spaceships received a message from Haskel, the very first throughout the entire course. They were requested to complete a survey. It was compulsory for every member on the ship, both passengers and staff or Haskel would no longer provide any form of protection to any uncooperative unit.

To be frank, if the survey was passed at the beginning, the threat would slip their eyes without notice and probably most ships would just quit the party themselves upon the indirect disrespect. However, in the past few days the ships had witnessed the heroic acts of Haskel so the situation had changed as it had become an unconditional, unsaid agreement among them to have Haskel as the leader.

Yang Ming was there to complete the survey. He would be reporting to his uncle in regards of the questions given. Those were some basic questions, such as Your Strength, Your Favorite, Your Health Condition and Your Experience in Piloting. In no time Yang Ming had done the survey, though in total bewilderment. Of all times, why would people on Haskel want to know these trivialities now?

In the next 5 hours, 5 spaceships were expelled from the fleet. Yang Ming was told that these spaceships were the unconvinced rebellions of Haskel's request. The survey was ignored and no action was taken. They thought nothing would happen till Haskel sent a new request, demanding them to leave the fleet immediately. Well, of course, similar to the survey request before, they showed ignorance. Eventually 3 warships suddenly surrounded these 5 spaceships and they got held back. The people on those ships could do nothing else than bidding a silent farewell to the fleet.

Such event had gained greater obedience from the other

spaceships. They realized it was not a time to crack jokes. It was a period where red-tailed beasts could be anywhere in the galaxy and these spaceships had left the fleet. Well, their fate was instantly imaginable and certainly the remaining spaceships would not want to join them.

The more horrifying part was, somehow Haskel was fully informed of everything on each spaceship in the fleet, including their vessel, the supplies they contained.

Very soon after, Haskel announced a sequence of measures to be conducted. Even though Yang Ming knew he would never be able to get anything from his uncle regarding the measures, he was given a mission to transfer to one of the medium-sized spaceships for training.

Speaking of training, Yang Ming was as average as you and I. His physique was average, his strength was average, his dexterity was average and his piloting skill was average too but there was one particular feature that probably caught the leader of Haskel - his talent in machines. That also happened to be the core module of his training on the ship too. He was transferred there, along with 3 other companions who shared the same talent as him. Apparently there were also other modules too which had taken a handful of other Yangs he knew. Well, no doubt he had the greatest envy towards the Yangs who got assigned to pilot-training.

Nobody suspected a thing, since it was a command from the great one. Haskel must have a well-trained army. It almost seemed natural for Haskel to have one, probably at least a few hundreds of them. They were the group who slew red-tailed beasts effortlessly after all. It would be a golden opportunity for the folks to be trained by these experts.

However, Yang Ming did not feel anything in particular. He was more interested in the machines he would be touching. Clearly, Haskel wanted more forces for they commenced trainings for ordinary, almost good-for-nothing youngsters like them at such a

critical period. So he had to work hard!

Inside the transporting unit, he clenched his fists as he looked at his family who remained on their own ship, waving excitedly shouting an unheard goodbye to him.

Haskel, once hollow was now filled with a massive, lively crowd, like an opening day for a military camp. The youngsters could not help but to jump around, enthralled for they passed the first phase of inspection. The survey was a kind of interview while there was the second selection process right inside Haskel. The qualified would receive notification regarding them joining the official pilot training successfully. The unqualified, sadly, had to take the transport back to their own ships right away.

There were 1500 members who passed the selection process, and they were quite a talent too because of their physique and mech understanding. There were also 200 adult pilots who would receive a different training in order to accommodate them in the war field later.

Chapter 491: At Full Force

Xi Qing simply did not expect him becoming leader of a squad consisted of over 600 members. He was very thrilled at first, finding everything in his command so interesting but it was not long till he realized that it was more of a responsibility than mere fun of pointing people around. The first few days lapsed like years to Xi Qing, his nerves were tightened by both demand and stress. Nevertheless, he managed to shoulder the consuming responsibility few days after.

Every 5 persons would form a team and every 5 teams would form a group. The conglomeration went on as every 5 groups would form a camp and every 5 camps would form a squad. Both Shu and Xi Qing were the commanders of the squad.

As planned, the head leader of team leaders would receive a detailed guide on combat tutoring. No doubt passion burned high within every young man's soul, including Xi Qing who went on a reading spree like a famished tiger. The young men were certainly young, were clearly inexperienced but they worked hard, harder than they imagined.

It was not only about pride, or dream.

It was about their survivals!

Xi Qing was new. Not everyone wholeheartedly identified him as the leader, since obviously in the eyes of the people he was none other than an immature brat who had not even undergone his puberty completely. It was a joke, a bad one too. Not once in their career of handling the steer they had heard a mere boy leading a squad of 600.

Well, there should have been dramas, but again, interaction between pilots had always been rather simple and straightforward. People recognized Xi Qing when he destroyed 30 mechs with his team. Shu acted the same too, as if having an invisible bond with

Xi Qing, though his style was way harsher - he spoke with his fists, not machines, proven as he was standing by the pile of 10 few people collapsed.

And the discrimination was only the beginning. There were a whole crew of people waiting to see them fall. They had to train this batch of newbies to master strategic formations within the shortest time possible. It was the whole point of their position and it was difficult, realized Xi Qing. Their indifferent instructor had given them a whole set of standard training course yet there were a lot of details to be taken care of.

He was almost dead beat after the training. Yup, almost. Both Shu and Xi Qing were still mentally strong beings. They would not fall, especially with such a golden opportunity in hand. This might be the only chance they could show themselves before hitting adulthood. Frankly they might just be one of the minions if they resigned, given their age. So they had a head start compared to most people of their age.

They put in their everything in training the newbies, that they would even have a professional discussion with each other at night. Assuming they met an issue unable to be sorted out among themselves, they would always look for the instructor.

And the instructor sure was an amazing wise figure, for he was always able to sort out their problems in a few words, that it felt like a knock on their head whenever the answer was revealed to be really simple. It made them fairly curious of the instructor's background. It was blatant that the instructor had led a massive operation before, while usually only the commanders of the well-established military hierarchy of the Research Consortium or the leader of a gigantic pilot squad would have such a rare experience. Only either-or, there should not be any other possibility, especially when the instructor was pulling off a typical standardized military management on them. They were in Gray Valley, probably the instructor was from Gray Valley, so the instructor should be the

one in command of the consortium's military.

Well, if only the instructor nodded on their speculation right away.

He never admitted to any of the hints they hurled.

The boys were very intrigued yet they could not get a definite answer from the instructor. They were also running out of time so they could only set their gossip aside.

Meanwhile the instructor, Ye Chong was pretty satisfied of both Xi Qing and Shu's performance. It was far-fetched for two newbies to produce such work. Their comprehension was great that they immediately caught on whatever he said and illustrated other similar ideas. For example, there was once they discussed the details on the training course. Both of them worked with their members and formulated a diverse course. The two of them even suggested a competition system which seemed to have fueled the enthusiasm among the members as the members worked like the last day of their life daily. The squad eventually improved dramatically.

Ye Chong had hardly contributed anything throughout the process. He was not that super great one as imagined by the boys. It was Shang who planned everything, from the hierarchy, the training course to the little handbook of combat tutoring in the hands of Xi Qing and Shu.

Whatever Ye Chong actually did was measly while most of them were demonstration of pure violence, like forcing himself into a spaceship to perform supply "reorganization". Well, he could have just asked someone else to do it for him most of the time.

Haskel was rumored as a spaceship of the arms dealer, yet ironically, little Ye Chong knew, there was indeed a vessel of the arms dealer inside the fleet.

The owner of this vessel named Flamethrower was a second-class

arms dealer, Wu Guang. He was an opportunistic merchant who gathered up every last few pennies around him to bulk purchase close-combat models upon seeing the war scene of the frontline. He believed there would be market and he would get profit. So he frantically loaded the 2000 units to the ship and wanted to zoom towards frontline as soon as possible.

Too bad, he was an opportunistic merchant with bad luck. Before he even started seeing flares of the frontline, he was already informed of the fall. He practically exchanged everything he had for a risk to become a part of the meteorites. He was smacking his head, calling himself foolish and almost wanted to jump into vacuum but well it would be better if he ran.

So on his way running to somewhere, he discovered this vey strange fleet. In the end he got to the back of the queue and sneaked into the fleet.

Throughout the course he had witnessed the legendary Haskel clearing out every red-tailed beast encountered. He was very glad to have joined this fleet uninvitedly, till one day he got a request from Haskel, kindly asking him to "contribute" all his close-combat models.

He wanted a negotiation but clearly he was negotiating with the wrong person. The negotiator was extremely skillful, even annoying, that he had not gotten a way to free himself from this awful deal. Every line from the negotiator was convincing enough to shut him up. Eventually he only could give all his mechs sincerely, with both hands. He believed, the negotiator would be an excellent merchant if he started doing business for real. The sole regret was he never managed to see this negotiator in person.

Soon the 2000 units were distributed. The "Fighter" model was not exactly a high-end tier among the close-combat units but was the only option for the trainees. Once the new pilots got a mech themselves, the training would be more efficient.

Alright, all things seemed settled. And Ye Chong realized, he was rather bored... He had nothing needed to be taken a look at. There were Shang to monitor the fleet for him and Xi Qing watching the training for him with Shu. Speaking of the two boys, they were maniacally training their members. It looked like training but definitely did not sound like one, as people could hear the loud slamming and thrashing echoing in the spaceship everyday.

Xi Qing and Shu had surpassed their teacher, that they did training more dead serious than Ye Chong. Mortality, casualties were none of their concern. They actually had 35 trainees wounded or passed out one day.

The mechanic trainees were arranged to be assistance of actual mechanics in the spaceship. Under the arrangement, every mechanic was naturally assigned with at least two assistances. As Shang had suspected, there were indeed a great deal of talents hidden among the folks in the fleet. He actually found out a masterly mechanic in the crowd, along with 30 advanced mechanics. The technician team alone was far more superior than whatever Haskel had in the beginning.

That was fun but Ye Chong was really bored...

...(Meanwhile at the mechanics' site)...

"Take a careful look now. This pressure-control valve is the most important part of the entire structure. It is what determines if this would be a machine or a piece of trash," said Harrell as his hand adjusted the valve constantly. There were 12 young men surrounding him as he explained working of every part in details. They were all ears to his words, and Yang Ming was one of them.

Underneath that snowy white hair of the master, Harrell had rosy cheeks of a child. The years he spent wielding the wrench had given him a strong physique. His voice was forceful to reach almost corners of the room. Being one of the top masters in Gray Valley, he was low-profiled. He declined any form of services

associated with a particular force. He preferred getting indulged in his research at home alone.

Nevertheless, he was a rational person. He understood how every ounce of strength mattered at the moment. So he decided to provide assistance the best he could, and he offered himself becoming the head engineer of the entire modification operation. As inspired by Haskel, he had provided a new modification plan.

Most features highlighted in Haskel's version of modification blueprint were retained, except the few new additions of offenses Harrell added. It had a similar concept, where the battery would still be the bait, inside a pathway which formed like a trap. So that would at least provide basic defense mechanism for the other spaceships.

But it was tricky to execute. The weaponry involved just be strong enough to penetrate the defense of red-tailed beasts.

It took great efforts among Harrell and the other advanced engineers to devise a proper plan. Of course, Ye Chong gave a few touches too, since he was that one genius who happened to know much about the almost-forgotten field of ancient mechanics.

Well, that was probably his greatest contribution during the period.

Ye Chong yawned, looking at the clusters outside the window.

"Ye, I want to play a game," said Shang, a rather preposterous proposal at a period like this.

Ye Chong was bewildered. It was a foreign term of luxury to him. He grew up without games to be honest. He had been racing with people, with money, with time. Never once he stopped strengthening himself and had something called... "Game...?"

"Jajaja..." Shang knew how to keep the boy interested, "Let's play a game that could strengthen yourself. Well, you could think it as a kind of training if you want to."

"Okay." Shang seemed pleased by the response.

"Take the helmet."

And Ye Chong, still bewildered, placed this strange, out-of-nowhere virtual world helmet on top of his head.

"Hehehehe, Ye, here we go~" Shang sounded excited...

"So am I, Ye." A cold voice rang in his head, unexpectedly.

"Mu?" Ye Chong was shocked. He was supposed to in a kind of hibernation...

"Hehehehehehehe, Ye, it took me some efforts to get Mu to join us. Well, the game would be fun with Mu here... Sinc-" Said Shang proudly, since it was indeed almost-impossible to get the artificial intelligence of cold logic to join the a game. "I'll explain the rules," Mu interrupted.

Shang's flashback was interrupted.

"Okay." Ye Chong went focused. He knew it would be fun.

If it was a game that caught Mu's interests, very likely it would be...

Wow, this would be exciting.

Chapter 492: The Mu/Shang Treaty

The game was simple. It would take place in a simulated environment of Gray Valley. All three of them would have a fleet each. It would be a kind of Battle Royale. The last one standing would win the game.

That sounded simple..."Sounded" simple.

Day 1: Ye Chong was the first to leave the game. Mu won in the end.

Day 2: Ye Chong again became the spectator in the first 10 minutes. Shang, with a twist, won in the end instead.

Day 3: Ye Chong lost everything in the first round. Mu won.

Day 4... Day 5... Day 6....

The days went on.

Haskel was leading the gigantic fleet as they advanced forward. The fleet was having intense training. The modification project was carried out aggressively. Everything was smooth outside, contrary to what was happening inside Ye Chong.

He was troubled, very troubled. He was tortured, as if a real torment.

They had played the fleet game for 20 days already and he was always the first to leave the war field. If it was not his chilled personality, he would have flipped out. He settled down and figured, formulating a new strategy again and again.

Everyday when he became the spectator, he would observe the exchange between Mu and Shang. Well, it would be easier for Ye Chong to understand the dynamic of a war field from a god's view being a spectator. Gradually, he started seeing something.

Both Mu and Shang won on a rate of 50:50 while both of their performances were shocking to Ye Chong. Mu had fully expressed

his efficiency and horrifying logical processing ability, as every step of his was meaningful and ahead of time, well-connected to each other. This could be seen especially during the few micro-matches where he clearly had an upper hand. Meanwhile, Shang took a different approach. His strategy was rather unpredictable, always able to surprise Ye Chong. A twist would take place the moment he was completely cornered. It was hard to imagine a humanoid to contain such cunning, creative schema in things.

One thing's for sure, Ye Chong was not able to harm either of them. Neither of the artificial intelligence's approach could be imitated by him momentarily, yet either of their strategies could set him on fire. As long as one side of Mu/Shang turned against him, he would be joining the spectators' seat in no time.

He started learning, bit by bit. He wanted to learn how Mu/Shang handled their own fleets. He had the brain for it, he was naturally talented in learning. Even though he was always the first to leave the battleground, the time he remained in it increased considerably over time.

It had been over 20 days. They had at least played 200 games and Ye Chong won none of them, nor he lasted to the later phase of each game. It was a horrible experience to lose so quickly that usually people would have given up and lost faith in life at the 100th game mark, unlike Ye Chong.

He was the one who had undergone far worse, far more boring training before. Moreover, it was not like he had no knowledge in his head. He had experienced a great deal of battles with individuals from all walks of life, even an actual war consisted of hundreds or even millions. The war game he had with Mu/Shang resembled greatly to whatever he had encountered in real life before. A lot of the details he had missed in the fights before somehow came to his attention out of a sudden after each game with Mu/Shang.

Ye Chong had always perceived himself as anybody but a

commander. When he was with the Sangs, Sang Pu was the commander in every operation. He had no idea why Shang would suddenly think of training his charisma, his capabilities as an actual leader. Well, if the game had only Shang, he could have pretended it as the artificial indulgence being indulgent and capricious again, but there was Mu too.

What made the logical, the probable, the feasible joined such pointless-looking game?

Wait, could it be that even Mu felt the need of training my capabilities as a leader?

When Shang mentioned about "being a hero" that day, he thought the artificial indulgence was making a joke, since it was clear, almost a common sense, a law that he wanted something else in his life, as known among the three of them. Mu was more understandable in his behavior compared to Shang. He hardly interrupted whatever Ye Chong was doing, he only would, when there was a need, a need to improvise for better efficiency.

So judging all the premises...

Ye Chong's heart skipped a beat.

Does Mu seriously think I need this? These thinking training?

"HAHA! Take that you tin can!"

And the explosion in the field recaptured his attention. "What was I thinking...", muttered Ye Chong as he put his attention back to the field.

Meanwhile in the field, it was the final stage of the game. Both Mu and Shang would be taking out either of each other soon. Mu had cornered Shang. Obviously, Shang would lose the game. Well, if only Shang did not have anything up his sleeves, he was the professional, awarded actor to play victim and eventually engulf people with his palate. Given Shang managed to perceive one opening in Mu's formation, he would make a turnabout. Mu could

certainly processed Shang's pattern of behavior, only if there was a pattern to begin with. It would still be a 50:50 even if Mu had produced a trend on Shang's behavior, let alone Ye Chong who did not have a super computer brain.

To be honest, Ye Chong preferred Mu's battle style which weighed everything on accurate calculation. The catch was, such style required everything mathematical, logical. Creativity, picking openings, playing off tricks were not allowed at all. If one did any of those, one would plan to fail. Ye Chong had not the necessary mathematical capabilities, he could only succumb to any of the techniques that looked useful to him between Mu and Shang.

Humans learned from their mistakes and only pressure could make them grow. Ye Chong's style had changed noticeably over the time fighting against the two extremes. His vision had improved greatly. Nevertheless, he was too engaged in handling Mu/Shang that he did not notice a thing on him.

Both Mu and Shang were too strong!

The exclamation kept ringing in his mind.

Few weeks lapsed again and finally he could last to the later portion of the match. Well, that only happened about 3 months since the game had started. Ye Chong used to feel powerless in every match, that it felt like he was lifting the wrong weight - everything felt too much to handle. However, as time passed by, he got stronger and would not give up even if he was losing. He would look for a turnabout to make.

Such tendency had gotten stronger each match.

In one match, he was left with only 100 pilots alive but somehow he managed to break free from the siege. He then allocated these 100 pilots in every gap between Mu and Shang's proximity, which the technique lasted him to the middle of the game. Even though he was wiped out at last, it gave him the confidence to work

harder.

Three months were not too long for an intergalactic trip. However, the fleet had changed.

The fleet constantly received requests from neighboring spaceships. The request was accepted of course, but with one condition - obedience. Most spaceships joined the fleet lastly since Gray Valley was chaotic at the moment. They might have lost the freedom but they got protection in the end.

Both Shu and Xi Qing seemed different than before. Xi Qing had turned calmer, yet bold. He really had the look of a commander now. People respected him.

Shu had gained a different charm. He had glasses on him, looking scholarly with his slender body. Not a single dirt or wrinkle could be found on his uniform. His tone was gentle as his personality yet people were seemingly cautious of him. Even the crew members who were not under his lead did not dare to speak senselessly in front of him.

They were also from the extreme, still they worked with each other well. Their instructor had been looking engaged inside the Virtual World, so they had to shoulder the duty of leading the team instead. They planned things carefully, fearing that something would go wrong. So their rapports grew.

It was not simple to seek a living in a chaotic world. Most spaceships in the fleet had completed the assigned modification. They now had traps to provide better security.

Nonetheless, both Xi Qing and Shu had never put the spaceships against the red-tailed beasts.

These little clusters of red-tailed beasts would be perfect for training their troops. Even though that would inevitably lead to some casualties but it was the only best way they could currently think of.

They looked at the report. Hmm, 1704 red-tailed beasts cleared since the past 3 months, while having 52 deaths and 109 wounded. It might look like a pessimistic figure, yet it was more than enough to shame those actual commanders at the front-line.

Such tedious training was extremely effective in bringing up the troops. Now both of the squads had reached a number of 2000. Xi Qing and Shu should feel proud for they were able to achieve this in as little as three months.

However, none of them were smiling, not even a brief lift of their lips' corners.

There had been discovery. The detection, the alarm had been wailing more frequently. The likelihood of encountering red-tailed beasts had been escalating, now that they would at least have an alert of red-tailed beast flocks everyday. Well, there were more opportunities to train troops. The rapports turned stronger among the soldiers too. But, the stress of safeguarding the people only increased at a horrendous rate.

And today, they had encountered the 5th flock of red-tailed beasts.

"We can't be doing this forever!" said one of them as they looked at each other. Worries were locking their brows.

...(Back to Ye)...

"Ye, we are taking a break from the games now," said Mu.

"Sigh." Even though Mu's decision was almost unshakable, Shang ranted, "Looks like we won't be having more fun anytime soon."

Taking a break. That indicated there would be more.

Well, it was a relief for Ye Chong. He really could use some breathers at the moment. He seriously could not imagine how he spent the last 3 months. The matches were endless, with the two extremes pressuring him the whole time. He had to fight back yet it was challenging. His nerves were tightened for so long. They did

have short breaks in between but those were the time when Ye Chong would collect his thoughts on whatever happened on the field before.

He removed the helmet and remembered his squads and the two great leaders-to-be. He wondered how they were doing since he had been playing games for so long and it was Shang who provided the little bit of guidance to the outside world during the game.

Xi Qing and Shu were troubled indeed. And they were happy to see the instructor marching towards them.

They immediately briefed the instructor on the situation and awaited his wise words. To them, the instructor was the core, the soul of this fleet... uhh... maybe the instructor and his mysterious friend*.

Ye Chong tried calling Shang, the mastermind.

"Yeesss...?" said Shang lazily.

Ye Chong repeated the summary, wished for a discussion.

"Oh, that?" Shang waved Ye Chong away in nonchalance, "Sorry, can't help you on that buddy. Hah. You do know why Master Mu accepted our treaty of playing games in the first place, right? Oh you did not? Here's the thing. He agreed on condition that I would no longer be interfering with your works. It's all up to you now. Can't help it, mate. I do not want my days ahead without any form of entertainment, like the games we had for example. Sorry, bruh."

And he faded out.

Chapter 493: Deduction

The starry sky stretched on to the edges of the universe. Nebulae flared in brilliant colors like ephemeral space clouds. This familiar sight brought on a different emotion within Ye Chong. Looking back, he could see that Mu had already been planning for his independence. If there was only one person he could trust in this whole wide world, it would definitely be Mu/Shang. Mu's support was always there, and even Shang with all his pointless tricks had never disappointed him. That Mu and Shang would come to an agreement on this meant that they both believed that he should be independent.

There was no dread, no fear, no sense of loss - Ye Chong continued as usual. Nothing seemed to have changed, but something still felt off.

Now, he had no one to discuss his next steps. Ye Chong stared at the star chart of Gray Valley on the holographic screen in a daze. In the last few months, he, Mu and Shang had been playing their games with Gray Valley as the scene. Ye Chong could visualize the star chart with his eyes closed. He could even tell the minerals that could be found in each corner of the place.

After Mu and Shang cracked Gray Valley's virtual world encryption, they scoured through the virtual world for all the information they could get that was related to Gray Valley. Hence, their game, set up in Gray Valley, was at least 70 percent accurate compared to reality.

On this star chart, the red zones continued to expand. The red zones indicated where red-tailed beasts had arrived, and the color intensity told the frequency in which the creatures were sighted. The star chart was updated everyday as Shang continued to gather intel. Mu and Shang had decided to not interfere with Ye Chong's role in strategizing, but they would still offer technical assistance. Since Shang's intel came mostly from the virtual world, it was

hard to gauge its accuracy. There was a lot of uncertainty involved.

Even so, the information was an important reference for Ye Chong.

Though he was unfamiliar to the silence on Mu and Shang's part, Ye Chong tried to concentrate. He rested his chin on his hands, staring at the holographic screen while his mind raced through possibilities.

The situation was serious! That was Ye Chong's first conclusion.

A few months ago, he would not have concluded anything meaningful from the star chart. Now, he could make at least make a few deductions from the uneven red stains on the star chart.

From the star chart, it seemed that the red-tailed beasts were beginning to spread throughout Gray Valley. However, most of the area was still a light red. This meant that the creatures did not appear so often. Ye Chong focused on the places where the red was the most intense, and a terrible image of disaster came to mind. He imagined how the intense red would spread like wildfire across the entire Gray Valley.

More importantly, the Gateway towards He Yue Galaxy was now decided in red-tailed beast territory. Shang had colored the area around the Gateway in dark red as the frontline. Even without the color, Ye Chong would have deduced the situation over there. That the heavily guarded Gateway was yielded to their enemy showed just how strong the red-tailed beasts were.

Their plan to head towards Duodania would have to change. Ye Chong was not confident that they would be able to break through the red-tailed beasts at the Gateway with their current strength.

Where to, then?

Ye Chong frowned. The huge expanse of Gray Valley seemed to offer no refuge for them. Ye Chong was confident of his own ability that, should they not encounter a large group of red-tailed

beasts, they should be able to fight back, at least.

The dreadful redness seemed to taint every corner of Gray Valley. It was like a star chart marred with blood, or a map punctured with the jaws of death.

Their prospects were bleak, leaving not enough time for Ye Chong. Their slower flight had also allowed the red-tailed beasts behind them plenty of time to catch up.

However, Ye Chong was not worried about that. He was more focused on the distribution of red-tailed beasts in the star chart. He had seen how the spread of redness on the star chart changed over time. The hidden intention of the red-tailed beasts troubled him.

At first, Ye Chong noticed that the main army of the red-tailed beasts was advancing very slowly, even slower than their own starship. With the frontline army defeated, their final hurdle was removed. The red-tailed beast army should have overwhelmed Gray Valley by now. Ye Chong could not understand why they hesitated.

It was only a month later that Ye Chong began to catch a glimpse of the truth.

On the star chart, the dark red areas spread out like four tentacles. Two of them stretched out along the edge between Gray Valley and the Calamitous Asteroid Belt. These red-tailed beasts pushed forward quickly, and were already ahead of Ye Chong's ship. The other two formed the main red-tailed beast army. They advanced slowly but steadily, undeterred by any human forces they met along the way.

Ye Chong's time spent on the games were worth it - he could tell roughly what the red-tailed beasts were trying to do.

The red-tailed beasts knew how to plan their battles! This completely surprised Ye Chong. The red-tailed beasts that he saw near Yi Ju were a disordered bunch that fought only by instinct. It

was thanks to this that the Sang Tribe did not lose even more people.

He could not deduce what happened to cause this change in the red-tailed beasts without any further information to work on. However, that was a problem to be filed away for later.

If he guessed right, the two red-tailed beast forces moving quickly along the boundaries of Gray Valley would converge at a single point, creating a circle of creatures around Gray Valley. The two main forces within would simply plough through the inside regions with unstoppable vigor.

What made the red-tailed beasts opt for this strategy? They could have just pushed forward with a single main force.

Surround and destroy! The thought came to Ye Chong almost instantly. A chilling sensation followed swiftly. Could it be ... Could it be that chasing away the humans was not enough for them?

Ye Chong considered the possibility and found it to be highly likely! The armies at the flank were advancing quickly, ignoring the planets that they passed by. They may not be as powerful as the main army, but once both armies join forces, they would act as a strong barrier that would prevent anyone from escaping Gray Valley. The main forces could then take their time destroying the inhabitants within.

Was this really the case? Ye Chong's calmness gave way to nervousness. His back was drenched in cold sweat. The results of his deduction had shocked him.

Ye Chong quickly calmed himself down and repeated his deduction process. He reached the same conclusion for three times.

He no longer paused to wonder at the cruel designs by the red-tailed beasts. What he needed now was an answer to an important

question.

Where would the two flanking red-tailed beast armies rendezvous?

It was an important question, and one that might become the key to their survival.

It took a long while, but in the end, Ye Chong's eyes focused on a particular point on the star chart.

Xi Qing and Shu were beside Ye Chong, quiet as mice so as to not interrupt their instructor.

Just then, the alarm rang, startling all three of them.

"Warning, red-tailed beasts sighted, there are -" The reporting crew's voice trembled, "- there are 1,632 of them!"

Xi Qing and Shu paled!

1,632 red-tailed beasts! This was almost the sum of all the red-tailed beasts they had ever encountered before this. It was no wonder that they both looked shocked.

On the holographic screen, the red-tailed beasts looked like a swarm of angry hornets, coming towards them.

Ye Chong gave his order calmly, "Round up the starships. All combat personnel to your designated stations. Get ready for battle!"

"Yes sir!" Xi Qing and Shu gathered themselves then, acknowledged their superior, and rushed out of the room. They were now even more impressed with their instructor. To be so calm and collected despite their predicament, he was obviously a man far more capable than themselves.

This time, they would attack with all they have.

"Hurry up - energy cells - over here!"

"Pressure valves checked, passageway hatch checked -"

"In your positions now. Please head to Position 2 -"

"Group 1, secure Passage 1. Group 2, secure Passage 2 -"

The entire fleet waited in suspense. The ships stayed close to each other. Crew members dashed through the corridors, yelling at the top of their lungs. Eyes were opened wide, faces were flushed ...

Five Fighter mechs took their positions at their designated passageway. Behind them were four other squads as backup.

"Squad Captain, do you think we'll win this time?" One of the mech pilots could not help but asked through the comms.

Their captain replied without hesitation, "Nonsense! Of course we will!" Then, he added unsurely, "I say, Major, don't you start chickening out. Hehe, if you're not up to it, I'll have you switched out!"

They all knew that the first wave of red-tailed beasts would be the strongest, and it would most likely be their make or break moment. Hence, the mech pilots for the first round of engagement were the bravest, and had the most casualties. They were also the heroes among them all, a symbol of courage, and respected by everyone in the fleet. People call them the spearheads.

A few of them laughed in the comms. Some began to jeer, "Haha, Major, wanna switch with me? Hehe, I always wanted to be a spearhead -"

Major flushed red, all the way to his neck. He growled like an angered beast, "Get lost! Who's chickening out? Squad Captain, I'll show you how to crush those b*stards! I'm a f*cking spearhead!" His hoarse voice was filled with pride and eagerness for battle!

Chapter 494: Changes I

Yang Ming panted heavily, drawing air greedily into his lungs. His arms hung beside him, trembling, and his fingers were white from overexertion. Around him were a few young people lying around.

Yang Ming was not skilled enough to repair mechs, but he could still handle structures that were not overly complicated. He was still young by all standards, but still earned respect from his peers due to being a student of Harrell the Great. Besides, being young was the norm in the fleet. One could see young people in almost every major department.

Yang Ming had also proven himself. As the main person in charge of the ship's structural maintenance, his track record had been immaculate.

"Passage 9 is shut. Maintenance crew, please enter immediately." Yang Ming heard the announcement. His hands stopped shaking.

"Folks, time to move out!" Yang Ming sounded hoarse. He went to his comrades and patted them on their shoulders.

The exhausted young people opened their tired eyes, and struggled to stand up.

Yang Ming noticed their fatigue. He was feeling overworked as well. The war was not over, however, and so they could not rest yet. There were eight of them in charge of the starship's structure. With no one to support them, experienced maintenance crew members became heavily relied upon. They must repair the damaged mechs as soon as possible. The battle at the frontline may not even be as vicious as they had it here.

Yang Ming and the crew entered Passage 9.

It was a mess inside. Bits and pieces of the red-tailed beasts were lying everywhere. The air was heavy with the scent of blood. This

was not his first time seeing this, but Yang Ming still felt a wave of discomfort.

At the same time, he felt more encouraged every time he saw this. Even his comrades were proud of their battle results.

"Heh, another three! I counted them. We got 11 dead on our ship, it's a big win!"

"You're too easy to satisfy. Just 11? I say, we gotta get at least 20!"

"Dude! 20? What's so good with 20? Of course we gotta aim for 30!"

"Haha -"

Yang Ming managed a smile on his face as he continued working, going through the structure of the passageway. The red-tailed beasts were strong, and their desperate struggles before they died could easily damage the passageway. They needed to repair all the damaged parts so that the passageway could be reused.

Ye Chong sat in Haskel's control room. On the holographic screen, the red-tailed beasts came in waves towards their fleet. As the lead ship, Haskel was their main target.

Ye Chong watched with a calm expression. He was not at the frontline of their battle this time, which was unusual. Given the scale of the battle, one man's strength was insignificant. In this entire fleet, he was the only one capable of commanding! Xi Qing and Shu were good fighters, but still inexperienced in battles of this scale.

The three months of games played against Mu and Shang were immensely helpful. Ye Chong could now maintain a calm composure as he studied the bigger picture and gave orders to his men, almost like a veteran general.

Battles that resulted from encountering enemies had always been Mu's forte. He could unleash the full potential of their available resources. This was something that not even Shang could do,

much less Ye Chong. Even so, Ye Chong learned from both Mu and Shang, and he had been trying to emulate Mu's methods. If he did not improve himself, how could he expect to hang on until the end of the battle?

Unfortunately, he was short of hands, and limited in options for their means of offense!

This group of red-tailed beasts were cunning, choosing to focus on the starships that were the furthest out. They would wait for the right time and single out a ship to focus their attacks on.

So far, Ye Chong had lost five starships.

This strategy looked familiar! Ye Chong thought back to this one time during his games, where Shang had used this strategy to devour him completely. Ye Chong remembered the battle clearly. He had watched his own soldiers slowly destroyed by his enemies, and the helpless feeling throughout was unbearable. However, what Ye Chong remembered most about that particular game was not his sense of helplessness, but how Mu had managed to defeat this particular strategy of Shang's!

Ever since then, Ye Chong felt that his perspectives had widened even further.

The explosion from one of his starship's illuminated his features. Ye Chong decided to make some changes to his plan.

Arwa was donned in neat military attire as he stood up straightly before Xiao Wan. He looked calm, but his eyes betrayed the gratefulness he was feeling. The Young Miss was finally looking invigorated!

Xiao Wan still looked worn and tired, but her eyes now showed steely determination.

"Thank you for all your effort these days!" Xiao Wan expressed sincerely.

Arwa bowed slightly, "It is my duty."

Xiao Wan watched Arwa in his stiff military uniform and felt a wave of emotions rushed up to her. Arwa had never liked wearing it, and he was the only one in the Xiao Family army who refused to wear the military uniform. It was only a small gesture, but Xiao Wan could see that he was doing all he could for their current predicament. Arwa had always looked like an honest young lad from a rural village, but now he had the charisma of a general.

"What's the situation right now?" Xiao Wan asked.

"It's not looking good," Arwa looked worried as he explained, "We've lost our best opportunity!"

Xiao Wan understood him. She knew that Arwa was referring to the war at the frontline. Arwa had been openly against it, but his lowly position meant his opinion went ignored. After the war, there was little left in the Xiao Family Army. Even the 1st Platoon's Commander, Guang Bei, did not make it. Xiao Wan's heart ached at the memory.

Arwa knew that he had misspoke, and quickly added, "However, we're not without hope."

He had the Young Miss's attention now. Arwa quickly elaborated, "I've gathered many mech pilots along the way. We now have 1,500 mech pilots. It's not exactly an army, but enough to bring us to Planet Duodania. Once we enter the He Yue Galaxy, we'll be alright!"

Xiao Wan was confused. "Isn't He Yue Galaxy also invaded by the red-tailed beasts?"

Arwa explained, "The red-tailed beasts are also in the He Yue Galaxy, but the place is larger, with enough room for us to find a place to settle down. Besides, the He Yue Galaxy may be at war now, but its core areas remain unaffected. We can find a place to lay low in the meantime. I think that once the aristocratic families

got rid of the red-tailed beasts, they will most likely be weakened as well. It will be our chance to rise again. On the contrary, Gray Valley is small, and lacked the space for us. Additionally, with our defeat, half of Gray Valley's combatants are gone. It's only a matter of time before Gray Valley falls under the control of the red-tailed beasts." It was in moments like these that Arwa looked like the genius tactician that he truly was.

Xiao Wan considered Arwa's analysis carefully.

Arwa made sense, but this would mean them leaving Gray Valley, the place she grew up in. It was also nearly impossible for them to ever return.

"You think that it's more to our advantage to move to the He Yue Galaxy?" Xiao Wan asked after a long moment.

"Yes!" Arwa replied firmly without hesitation.

Xiao Wan took a deep breath and made her decision, "Alright! Then let's try our luck in the He Yue Galaxy!"

Arwa was pleased to hear that. "Thank you, Young Miss!"

"Thank you? You can thank me for sending Guang Bei to his death in a pointless war." Xiao Wan looked sad as she said this, with a hint of self mockery.

Arwa could only sigh quietly to himself. He remembered something then. "Young Miss, right now we are in urgent need of close range mechs. Without them, we'll be heavily disadvantaged against the red-tailed beasts."

"Close range mechs!" Xiao Wan pondered on it, then lifted her gaze to Arwa, "What do you suggest?"

"We steal them!" Arwa forced the words out of his mouth.

"Steal them?" Xiao Wan did not look troubled at all, as though it was a natural decision. She mused, "From who?"

She looked at Arwa meaningfully and said, "You probably

thought of everything already, so let's hear it."

Arwa chuckled and said, "Sharp as always, Young Miss. There are not many organizations with close range mechs now, and most of them are too strong for us. In the end, the Research Consortium seems to be the best option."

"The Research Consortium?" Xiao Wan looked hesitant, but did not reject the idea immediately. "The Research Consortium is too powerful for us to meddle with. I believe that it will be difficult."

Arwa laughed. "Maybe not. The Research Consortium's intel has always been the most reliable in Gray Valley. Nothing escapes them. News of defeat at the frontline must have reached them. The Research Consortium is powerful, but they don't have many mech pilots. If that's the case, their best option is to gather their people and focus on defense. Besides, they're mostly cowards. I believe that the Consortium's headquarters must be empty by now. In the haste of their retreat, they might have left something in their warehouses. These things are now free for all. Hehe, why not take them for ourselves? Of course, it will depend on our luck."

Xiao Wan thought through Arwa's words. She clenched her teeth and made her decision. "Alright! We'll do as you say!"

Chapter 495: Changes II

Green Arrow was one of the midsized starships in the fleet. It was also one of their 12 warships, with 125 mech pilots. According to Ye Chong's designations, each warship would have a Company of pilots.

Today, Green Arrow was led not by its usual leader, the 5th Company's Sergeant, but by Captain Xi Qing. Not only did Xi Qing himself was sent to Green Arrow, he also brought another four Companies to the ship. This brought the number of mech pilots onboard the Green Arrow to 250.

Xi Qing boarded Green Arrow when the ship retreated deeper into the fleet to reorganize its crew.

"Thank you for your hard work, everyone!" Xi Qing nodded in greeting and respect to the mech pilots and gestured for them to remain seated.

He looked around, and saw that everyone had their attention on him.

"Now, there's a very difficult task to be assigned to you. Are you scared?" Xi Qing smiled.

"No way!"

"Hell no!"

"Captain, when has any one of us said we're scared?"

"That's right, just say the word and we'll get to it!"

... ..

They sounded loud and energetic enough. Some even stood up in protest.

"Alright! We have good people fighting with us!" Xi Qing said with pride. "However, the task we have is hard enough that we'll need another four Companies to fight alongside us. I hope we can

all work together and take down those creatures!" Xi Qing made a downward slashing motion with his tightly clenched right fist.

"Yes Sir!" Everyone roared out.

The red-tailed beasts were numerous like a locust plague, and they had many starships in the fleet. The fragile parts of the starships had all been fortified, so the red-tailed beasts could not do much to them. For the moment, the battle had reached a stalemate. The red-tailed beasts stayed together despite their numbers, maintaining their large formation. Since Ye Chong's side could not send out any ships to battle it out, he could only be on the defense. In short, the red-tailed beasts held the active position in the battle.

Suddenly, three starships left the fleet and came out.

The three starships immediately drew the attention of the red-tailed beasts. In fact, Ye Chong's fleet was too strongly defended that the thousand-strong red-tailed beast army was like an ant before an elephant. Even though many red-tailed beasts were drawn away by the energy cells and left the main army, the great majority of red-tailed beasts were still in formation.

The sudden movements from the three starships was a striking turn of events in the battle.

The red-tailed beast army went for the ships without delay. They were much faster and more agile than the starships. The starships made all sorts of evasive maneuvers to no avail.

The crew members in the three starships heard what sounded like raindrops falling onto their ships. In just a moment, the red-tailed beasts were crawling all over the three ships. It was a terrifying sight.

Major's forehead glistened with sweat that went rolling down his cheeks. He was panting heavily. He was in an agitated state right

now. His face was unnaturally red, and his breaths were short and laboured. He knew that the stakes of this battle had never been higher. How much higher, he did not know.

"Open the hatch!"

The heavy metal hatch in front of him opened silently.

Major straightened himself. He held his breath as he locked his gaze at the hatch exit. Right now, he was like a wild beast ready to unleash its full strength.

Five red-tailed beasts came into the passageway like predators that smelled blood.

Behind them were several more red-tailed beasts.

Five Fighter mechs were already positioned into a defensive formation. The red-tailed beasts rushed in like a black tsunami wave, reaching the Fighter mechs in an instant.

Bang bang bang bang bang!

Under the continuous impacts, all five Fighters were forced back a few steps! The red-tailed beasts had strongly collided into them. The creatures did not fare too well themselves, looking slightly taken aback. However, they continued to swiftly move, sticking to the sides to allow more of their kind to enter the passageway.

"Hold your positions!" Major shouted. Veins showed on his temples, but his hands moved quickly. He knew that this was not the time to retreat. If they did not hold their position now, they would be pushed further back and closer to defeat.

Wham! Major's Fighter stomped into the ground, pushing the mech forward.

The squad members understood each other perfectly. There was no cowardice in these spearheads! They all knew without Major's reminder that they must not back down now.

The four Fighter mechs adjusted themselves and pushed forward,

pushing against the ground or the side walls. They found themselves right behind Major's mech again in no time.

"Go to hell!" Major yelled as he ran straight into one of the red-tailed beasts that was coming in. His Fighter's metal fist connected with the red-tailed beast's arrowhead tail, creating sparks.

The strong impact nearly threw Major off balance, but the Fighter suddenly reached out with its left mechanical arm and grabbed onto the red-tailed beast's right ankle.

With its ankle caught, the creature was surprised, and whipped its red arrowhead tail towards the mech's throat.

The Fighter anticipated it and narrowly avoided the attack.

This short exchange made a whole world of difference for the red-tailed beast. The four Fighter mechs criss-crossed over, and the trapped red-tailed beast was cut into eight pieces.

Major breathed heavily as he stared at the dead red-tailed beast. The passageway was now full of red-tailed beasts. There were no less than dozens of them inside, and it was a terrifying idea to deal with.

The other red-tailed beasts were unaffected by the death of one of its own. They were staring yearningly at the energy cells behind the mechs.

Major and his squad regrouped into formation. The next part of the battle was going to push them to their limits.

Just as the red-tailed beasts were trying to enter the passageway, the three starships with red-tailed beasts crawling all over them were slowly making their way back to the fleet.

The other starships quickly made way for these three starships, now filled with very dangerous cargo.

These starships were very close to the three starships. They all kept their passageway hatches open. An energy wave that was very

familiar to the red-tailed beasts faintly but clearly came from within, despite the main attraction in the three starships.

The red-tailed beasts that could not fit themselves into the passageways were drawn by the energy cells of these starships along the way. Soon, the red-tailed beasts began to drift away in twos or threes away from the three starships towards these distractions.

There were too many energy cells around them such that each passageway would only attract a few red-tailed beasts.

The number of red-tailed beasts on the three starships reduced gradually over time. It was like watching a huge block of ice melt from a warm breeze, bit by bit.

Xi Qing saw the empty space before him and felt the worry in him relaxed a bit. It was time!

He knew that the decisive part of the battle had arrived!

Seven starships that had prepared themselves now surrounded the three starships. The few red-tailed beasts that remained there suddenly realized that there was a much stronger energy wave coming from around them!

They got excited immediately and quickly abandoned the three starships for the other seven starships.

With so many red-tailed beasts drawn away, the remaining creatures were few enough to be absorbed by these ten starships.

There were not many red-tailed beasts left in outer space. Most of them had already been lured into the passageways of the ships. Only a few slower ones were still outside.

Suddenly, all ten starships closed their hatches shut.

Now, the red-tailed beasts that were still outside began to sense that something was amiss, and began to panic. They could sense an impending threat and wanted to leave, but found that there was

nowhere to escape.

The seven starships had formed a small but tight surround formation. The space between them could only allow one or two red-tailed beasts to pass through at any time. Here was also where squads of mechs were now in position. In outer space, a single mech could never hope to win against a red-tailed beast, but now the mechs could make up for this disadvantage by their strength in numbers.

Lure the enemy, disperse their forces, and surround them. Ye Chong's plan had been executed perfectly so far.

The red-tailed beasts struggled more fiercely than Ye Chong had anticipated. The battle took place for almost five hours.

The first large scale battle by Ye Chong's fleet ended with their victory. The battle had been won with fine results. After the battle, the number of red-tailed beasts killed totaled up to 1,431 of them. They even managed to capture 20 of the creatures alive, which would be very important for research purposes.

This victory against the red-tailed beasts was unprecedented, a win on the largest scale ever recorded in Gray Valley.

The entire fleet basked in joy of their triumph. Everyone saw hope in their survival, having witnessed how they could take control of their own fate. The battle was a strong boost of morale for all the crew members.

Nonetheless, Ye Chong could not be happy with the tallied numbers at the end of the battle. They had lost close to 500 mech pilots, and suffered 300 more casualties. The casualty rate was at 50 percent, while death was close to a third. This victory was hard won. If they repeated the same battle a few times, there would be nothing left of the fleet.

The only thing that Ye Chong could appreciate was the fact that while they had lost many mech pilots, their overall battle strength

had been elevated. Experienced mech pilots were different from newbies. An army that had fought an actual, hard won war was different from an ordinary army.

In the end, Ye Chong regretted nothing. He had already done his best, leading a batch of freshies and obtaining such a result. Even Shang was a little surprised.

Little did he know that this victory had given him much more than that.

Chapter 496: Changes III

"Instructor, we have five starships requesting to join our fleet," Xi Qing reported to Ye Chong. Standing beside him was Shu, donned in a neat uniform. Ever since their victory last time, many starships approached them to join their fleet. So far, the fleet had expanded to include 800 ships, and total number of crew members added up to 250 thousand. Even the number of warships had gone up to 10.

Before these five starships, the fleet had accepted requests from 33 other starships on that same day.

"Alright," Ye Chong did no mince his words, "Just proceed according to protocol in future." Since many starships continued to join their fleet, the whole process of filtering and accepting requests and assigning them to groups had been streamlined. Shang played an important part in this, having set up most of the rules himself.

All accepted ships must obey orders from Haskel. They must also report their inventory, subject their crew members for inspection, and take part in battles of the fleet. This meant that all ships in the fleet would be at Ye Chong's disposal.

Under usual circumstances, these conditions would be unthinkable. No one would willingly offer their freedom up. However, the desperate need to survive overrode all other priorities right now, so no one gave up a fight.

Ye Chong did not know that the one responsible for spreading the news of their victory over the red-tailed beasts was actually Shang. Ye Chong's fake name, Jay, was now a symbol, a symbol of fighting against the red-tailed beasts. In areas where the red-tailed beasts were not an immediate threat, people took notice of this mysterious and peculiar fleet. Their leader, Ye Chong was at the heart of their discussions.

The victory had also raised Ye Chong's reputation in the fleet. His orders were obeyed to a tee by loyal subordinates. The crew members worked diligently, taking pride in their leader. The mysterious partner of his slowly faded into the background. Later members of the fleet did not even know that he existed.

Another result of the victory was Ye Chong becoming almost a worshipped hero to all his crew members.

Hence, despite the strict rules of acceptance, many still wished to join the mysterious fleet. Ye Chong never rejected any of them. Ever since their victory, they had suffered a huge loss in number of combatants that would benefit from replenishment.

Ye Chong looked at the two young men before him and said, "Keep up with the training, we don't have much time left."

Xi Qing and Shu felt the gravity of the order, and saluted in reply, "Yes sir!" They did not exactly know how much time they needed for what, but they also knew that some questions were better left unasked.

Ye Chong was satisfied with the performances of both Xi Qing and Shu. It was because of them that he had more time to think about other things.

"How many energy cells do we have left?" Ye Chong asked abruptly.

Xi Qing and Shu exchanged a look. Shu stepped forward and said solemnly, "Instructor, we're here because of this matter. Our last battle used up many of our energy cells. High intensity combat trainings are also exhausting our reserves quickly. Currently, we have only 3,600 energy cells. We are in need of an emergency resupply."

"That's right. Our fleet is too massive right now. We're using up our energy cells at an astonishing rate. If we don't resupply soon, we'll probably ..." Xi Qing made his point clearly.

Ye Chong paused in thought. He had neglected this important matter. He called up Gray Valley's star chart as he asked, "Where's the closest resupply point?"

"The S.S. Iron Scorpion," Shu replied with barely suppressed excitement beneath his calm exterior, "It's a space station built by the Research Consortium, and one of their base of operations. There should be a huge stock of energy cells there in storage," He added mischievously, "And maybe even a good load of mechs and starships."

Xi Qing said nothing. He was with Shu on this. The Research Consortium was a heavyweight in Gray Valley. Everyone here held the Consortium with regard. Gray Valley's existence was closely related to the Research Consortium. All these years, the Consortium had used their skills in technological advancements to improve Gray Valley as a whole. However, in this red-tailed beast disaster, the Consortium had done nothing effective apart from bringing together organizations from all parts of Gray Valley to form an alliance.

On the contrary, they had later chosen to do something that could almost be described as stupid - they left everyone behind and escaped. This was a huge disappointment for all the people who put their hopes in them. Xi Qing and Shu had experienced this firsthand. Ever since the frontline collapsed, the Research Consortium had done nothing meaningful to the people. It was as if they had simply vanished.

Ye Chong did not hesitate. "Have all combat personnel be prepared." Ye Chong did not share the sentiment that normal Gray Valley inhabitants had. From their early escape on Planet Henna, Ye Chong could tell that the Research Consortium was not actually not very powerful. Besides, their situation was urgent, and he could not afford to be picky.

"Yes Sir!" The two young men saluted.

The ten warships guarded ten starships, carrying 2,500 mech pilots in them. The procession was heading towards S.S. Iron Scorpion. Behind them were 50 midsize transport ships, all without cargo.

Ye Chong had deployed almost all his combatants for this operation. Out of the entire fleet, he was probably the only person who knew exactly how dire their situation was. If his estimations were accurate, they would be doomed once the two flanking red-tailed beast armies completed their surrounding formation. It was a race against time. Ye Chong spent most of his time thinking these days, but could not come up with any viable solution.

All those thoughts had strained him. His eyes were bloodshot. It was torture, knowing the intentions of the red-tailed beasts but unable to come up with a solution.

On top of all that, he now had the pressing issue of running out of energy cells! Knowing how desperate their situation was, Ye Chong hardly cared who the S.S. Iron Scorpion belonged to. After all, how could they be more dangerous than the red-tailed beasts?

Besides, he had 10 warships with him. These were useless against red-tailed beasts, but a formidable amount of firepower in usual warfare.

All this while, the power of those warships were suppressed. The 10 warships came from different organizations, and these organizations were all demolished. These days, the warships were pushed around like decorations since they were useless against the red-tailed beasts.

They were once glorious! Warships - their reputation was enough to command respect and privileges wherever they went.

Hence, when Ye Chong gave the order, all 10 warships readied themselves swiftly.

Mercury, the first warship to be incorporated into the fleet, was honored with the designation Warship 1.

"Everybody listen up! I want everyone to give me your 110 percent today. I won't forgive anyone who'll screw up! F*ck, we're the g*ddamn warship Mercury, born for war! Today, we will show Mercury's true power! Sir Jay is watching us, our future will depends on our performance today! You hear me, m*therf*ckers?!" Mercury's Captain barked menacingly.

"Yes Sir, Captain!" All crew members replied back thunderously. They had felt suppressed enough as it was.

The entire warship now operated in the highest state of combat readiness. Crew members dashed across the corridors, going about their duties with vigor. Warships were important resources for every organization. They were staffed by crew members who went through the strictest selection procedure. Right now, Mercury was like a power machine came to life.

"Shooters, to your combat stations."

"Calibrating shooting RPM. Activating weapons system."

"Energy cells in place."

"Logistics crew is go."

...

Mercury was not the only one. All 10 warships looked eager for combat. All cannons were deployed from their hatches, the menacing cannon barrels giving off a dark, chilling shine. Each cannon was fitted rows of energy cells with their safeties off, ready to refuelled or replaced on the go.

Ye Chong was taken aback by the eagerness of the 10 warships, but it was better this way. He had been worrying about them due to their mercenary backgrounds. Perhaps they would only work for the pay. Seeing them like this lifted his heart a little. With 10 warships on his side, even taking down the S.S. Iron Scorpion by

force would not be a problem

Unlike the warships owned by the MPA or Black Cove that Ye Chong had seen in the Five Galaxies, the warships in Gray Valley and He Yue Galaxy were much more potent. With more firepower, higher firing accuracy, better ship maneuverability and armor defense systems, these warships were far more powerful than their counterparts in the Five Galaxies.

Xue Lai Clan had the largest warship fleet. The Ye Family and Xi Feng Tribe also had their own sizable warship fleets. Every noteworthy organization would keep their warships competitive as a sizable force for war in outer space. The Research Consortium owned the largest warship fleet in Gray Valley, but now even their whereabouts were unknown.

Nevertheless, their opponent this time was Gray Valley. While members of the Consortium had always behaved unusually, their higher-ups had done nothing for the war this time. What would they do when faced with a direct challenge of power? Every inhabitant of Gray Valley had known the Consortium for its indomitable power. They could not help but doubt the outcome of this clash of powers.

Chapter 497: Changes IV

What was the Research Consortium thinking?

This was the question that everyone in Ye Chong's group was asking. No one was on the S.S. Iron Scorpion. It was like an abandoned city. The base was a mess. Things were scattered everywhere. Even the memory chips, which probably contained classified information, were simply left lying on the floor. The staff must have left in a rush.

What happened here? What happened to the Research Consortium? Ye Chong could not understand.

"What a nice piece of real estate! Too bad we can't use it. Would've been the perfect place for headquarters," Shang sounded regretful. Ye Chong did not comment further. It was true that the S.S. Iron scorpion was a wonderful choice for their base of operations. However, defending this place right now would be suicidal. The space station itself was of no value to Ye Chong.

Over the years, the S.S. Iron Scorpion was fitted with world class facilities. It was apparent that the Consortium spent a lot of effort in designing the space station.

With 500 mech pilots aboard, the place would practically be a castle, fortified by soldiers. Taking down the place with Ye Chong's army would not have been possible.

Ye Chong realized then the naivety of his optimism.

Fortunately, the Research Consortium's unexplained retreat had benefited him.

Ye Chong raised his voice abruptly, "Find the warehouse immediately!" A base like this must surely have a huge warehouse. That was their primary concern right now.

Ye Chong could only hope that the warehouse was not empty.

"Instructor! We found the warehouse!" Xi Qing reported to Ye Chong excitedly. Few people in the fleet were qualified to call Ye Chong "instructor". Most were his former student like Xi Qing and Shu. Most of the students worked at the grassroots level. They were Ye Chong's most loyal supporters.

The warehouse was located at the inner parts of the S.S. Iron Scorpion. Its structure was completely made of alloy to fortify it against attacks. Even a direct hit from a warship cannon would not be able to penetrate its tough walls.

The heavy alloy doors silently slipped open to both sides. It was dark inside the warehouse.

As the lights were switched on, the hopeful crew members quieted down, so much that one could hear a pin drop.

Inside the warehouse were stacks and stacks of goods. All the things were arranged methodically by their classifications. Some still had their identification barcode on them.

"This world is too crazy!" Ye Chong muttered to himself. He did not know why he said that, but the words seemed to spill out from his mouth.

After the initial shock, everyone recovered quickly. They looked overjoyed, but their ingrained discipline allowed to remain relatively calm.

Ye Chong waved his hand in a single and decisive stroke, "Take them! Take them all!"

After planning for the retrieval of all those resources, Ye Chong returned to Haskel. He was very happy with the operation. Perhaps the only people in the operation who were disappointed were the battle-hungry warship crew members. They had expected to demonstrate their strength to Ye Chong, but did not even get to fire a single cannon in the end. Once again, their roles became redundant.

The Research Consortium was rich! Even someone as unmoved by money as Ye Chong was amazed by their wealth. The mountain of resources in the warehouse had left him a little shell shocked.

However, what happened to the Research Consortium? He knew from intel that the Research Consortium was a organization that specialized in technology, but lacking in military strength. Nevertheless, their findings in the warehouse seemed to suggest that this was not the case. Ye Chong could tell that the S.S. Iron Scorpion was built as a military base.

All the signs suggested that the Research Consortium had left in a hurry, without time to organize themselves properly.

Well, in the end, what did all these had to do with him? Ye Chong laughed at himself wryly. If the Research Consortium had not left in a hurry, the resources in the warehouse would not have been left behind for him. Right now, he should worry more about his own predicament.

Ye Chong's expression turned heavy.

"Ye, don't look so sulky. Beware the wrinkles! Wrinkles are humanity's worst enemies! But I gotta say, Ye, you're doing not so bad recently Haha, keep it up!" Shang continued slyly, "Ye, I've been setting up a database of beautiful ladies recently. Would you like a copy? Hehe, it's got a chapter on Bing Bing!"

Ye Chong had nothing to say to Shang's blabbering.

Just then, the inventory list arrived for Ye Chong.

Ye Chong looked at the lines and lines of huge numbers in the inventory list, and realized once again just how much they had gained this time!

There were enough energy cells to last them quite a while. The fleet will not have to worry about energy cell supplies. One of the things that surprised Ye Chong was the number of mechs they acquired. They now had 5,000 D-6's! Ye Chong wondered what the

true purpose of the S.S. Iron Scorpion really was.

These 5,000 D-6's would be enough for Ye Chong's 2,500 mech pilots to use and swap turns. D-6 had much higher specs than Fighter. After the mech pilots got used to these mechs, Ye Chong's army would be significantly more formidable.

Numerous other things were retrieved from the warehouse. Ye Chong had ordered his subordinate to empty the warehouse, after all. Xi Qing and Shu executed his orders to the letter. Not even a single piece of paper was left in the warehouse. Even all the memory chips that were scattered on the floor in the base were salvaged. However, the information within them would have to be organized.

As the joy from their stroke of luck wore off, Ye Chong's frown returned.

The problem of energy cell supplies was resolved, but the main and most crucial problem remained. They had to figure out how to escape the surrounding formation of the red-tailed beasts.

He still did not have a viable solution.

The red-tailed beasts were much faster than they were. As the two flanking armies of red-tailed beasts were pushing their way forward as fast as they could, they were now left far behind. In other words, they were already in the trap of the red-tailed beasts, it was only a matter of time before they were completely enveloped by the enemy. Once that happened, there would be no escape.

Haskel was still in a joyful atmosphere. The crew members in the comms rooms were discussing excitedly about all the things that they managed to acquire. Their jobs did not require much from them. Most of the crew were either sitting or lying around, enjoying a cup of hot tea while they chatted with their comrades.

The comms room should have been a very important place in a starship fleet. It was rare for to see its staff unoccupied like this.

After all, they needed to relay orders from the fleet commander to the ships in the fleet, and mediate communication between other ships and the main ship. It was a very important job. However, their respected and beloved Sir Jay rarely used the comms room. His orders were usually directly given to Xi Qing or Shu.

"Say, how much do you think we got this time? I heard that we're filthy rich now! The things pile up like mountains!" One of the staff said.

"Of course, tsk tsk, the Research Consortium is wealthy after all. I'm so jealous!" Another staff replied from his half-lying position on a chair.

The comms room staff leader laughed and teased him, "Then go to the Research Consortium, why don't you? Hehe, don't worry, no one's gonna stop you."

"No way," the staff replied shaking of his head, "I wanna still live. Who else but Sir Jay who helped us survive right now? The Research Consortium? If they can help us, the S.S. Iron Scorpion would not have been left empty."

All around, people who were listening no longer felt so chatty. All this while, they had high hopes on the Research Consortium. However, reality is cruel. The Research Consortium's powerlessness had chipped away the confidence of Gray Valley's residents in them.

Suddenly, the main comms activated. The shrill beeping alarm cut through the silent comms room. The staff froze in surprise for a moment, exchanging looks of confusion before someone finally yelled, "It's Sir Jay!"

Everyone quickly got into position and linked to the main comms.

Ye Chong's holographic image came up on the comms. His calm voice came through like winter breeze, "Hear me. All ship captains

with more than two decades of experience, meet me in the control room, immediately!"

"Yes sir!" All the crew members saluted.

Crack! The holographic image of Ye Chong vanished, and the staff members heaved a sigh of relief. Sir Jay had abruptly passed down an order through them, and it had caught them off guard.

"Back to work," the staff leader said solemnly, all traces of his earlier congeniality gone. Everyone went to their stations and busied themselves. They must relay Sir Jay's orders to every starship in the fleet as soon as possible.

The anxious undertone in Sir Jay's voice was noticed by the staff. They tensed up immediately, and went about their tasks quickly. They were also feeling unsettled. Sir Jay had always been a symbol of invincibility to them. If anything could trouble the man, it must be a very big problem indeed.

They relayed Ye Chong's orders as quickly as possible, worded most strictly to every ship captain in the fleet.

About 10 minutes later, all captains with more than two decades experience in their position were gathered in the meeting room. They had dropped whatever was occupying them when they received the order and rushed for the meeting. Discipline in the fleet was strict. No one would dare to challenge Sir Jay's authority. By the time they arrived, Xi Qing and Shu were also present.

Those who were close to the two approached them to ask about the meeting, but it seemed that they too were unaware of the reason behind their gathering.

Just then, Ye Chong entered the meeting room.

Everyone stood up and salute, and Ye Chong saluted them back. Of course, Ye Chong was not the one who came up with these protocols. All the fleet's rules were Shang's doing. The effect was apparent, however. Everything was organized, and managing the

fleet's personnel no longer felt like a messy job.

Ye Chong minced no words, and went straight to the point.

"Currently, we face a problem that threatens our very survival!"

Chapter 498: Changes V

Gray Valley's star chart was brought up before the surprised ship captains. Ye Chong stood in front of the star chart, facing his audience. He spoke solemnly, "This is Gray Valley. The red zones mark where red-tailed beasts were sighted. This is our current location." He pointed to the S.S. Iron Scorpion on the star chart. He then traced his finger towards the region with the most intense red color and said, "This is the front line, where we came from."

Everyone watched in silent gloom.

"Let me tell you something. The Gateway that leads from Gray Valley to He Yue Galaxy is already invaded by the red-tailed beasts. It's still unclear where these red-tailed beasts came from."

"Ah!" The people were shocked. A few even stood up. Xi Qing and Shu exchanged a look of despair. The news was a horrible blow to them all, shattering their hopes of escaping to the He Yue Galaxy.

However, Sir Jay seemed to think his audience was not shocked enough. He continued, "Have a look over here, and here." He pointed to the two flanking red-tailed beast armies that were racing along the edges of Gray Valley.

"Shang, run the simulation," Ye Chong spoke quietly to Shang.

"Sigh, so I'm just your grunt, yeah?" Shang sulked with a face.

The red zones on the star chart began to change. The two flanking armies pushed forward at an astounding speed to form to a red enclosure.

The two armies finally converged!

After that, the red-tailed beasts spread out and formed a red barrier, splitting Gray Valley into two. The main army of red-tailed beasts in the center began to push their way forward.

In just a few short moments, the region within the surround

formation turned red through and through.

The meeting room was dead silent. Everyone looked pale.

They may not be war tacticians, but this straightforward simulation was easy to understand.

Was this their ultimate fate?

In the end, they would never escape the terror of the red-tailed beasts. Could it be that all their efforts so far were for naught?

The tension in the air was suffocating. The star chart that was dyed red reflected in the eyes of the audience.

For 10 minutes, no one in the meeting room spoke. Everyone felt a chilling sense of despair.

What a bunch of motley crew! Ye Chong shook his head inside. In the end, the fleet was made up of random amateurs who would be devastated when facing truly challenging odds. If it was the Sang Tribe, they would never react so passively.

Ye Chong could not appreciate what the red-tailed beasts meant for these normal people. He had killed countless red-tailed beasts himself, so the creatures did not scare him. Normal people, however, thought of the red-tailed beasts as invincible adversaries. Before Ye Chong carved his first victory, Gray Valley had never won against the red-tailed beasts in any large scale battles.

While their last victory was encouraging, this obstacle once again reawakened their perception of the invincibility of the red-tailed beasts.

Ye Chong thought that he should not let the silence continue. He spoke up then, "However, we are not entirely hopeless." Everyone looked up at that, turning their intense gaze to Ye Chong. That's right, didn't they still have Sir Jay?

"As you can see, the two flanking red-tailed beast armies will converge near Planet Kasent. Our only chance is to go beyond

Kasent before they converge," Ye Chong described the situation calmly.

As Ye Chong finished, a few of the captains expressed their disappointment, "How's that possible?"

"That's right, it's just impossible! We're too slow compared to the red-tailed beasts."

"How is that a solution?" Someone mumbled in complaint.

...

Ye Chong looked at the noisy captains. His gaze turned cold. Without further indications of his mood, he tapped his index finger lightly on the desk.

Someone noticed that Sir Jay did not look happy, and quickly reigned in the complaining captains. A few of grumbling captains saw Ye Chong's expression and realized what they had done. Their faces paled, and they shut their mouths immediately. Gradually, the grumbling sounds quieted down.

This time, only the sound of Sir Jay's index finger tapping on the desk could be heard. Each tap hammered down on their hearts. No one dared to speak. Sir Jay's authority in the fleet was absolute. No one dared to defy him. All the captains here had seen plenty of people in their lives. They could tell exactly what kind of man Sir Jay was. This man can kill without blinking!

Xi Qing and Shu were still too young to understand these things.

Ye Chong ignored the captains and turned to the very quiet Xi Qing and Shu, "Next time, if anyone causes a ruckus in the meeting room, escort them out immediately."

Xi Qing and Shu could read Ye Chong's dissatisfaction in his voice. They were terrified by this, and quickly stood up and saluted, "Yes sir!"

All the captains were still shocked, but none of them dared to

voice their opinion. They knew that they had behaved disgracefully.

Ye Chong looked around him, his gaze turning colder still. All the captains lowered their head, unable to meet his eyes.

"We are not discussing the possibility of achieving this. This is our only chance, for me and for all of you!" Ye Chong emphasized every word, then resumed speaking normally, "Of course, I face a very difficult problem, or I would not have gathered everyone here. It's impossible to go so far using conventional flight routes. I call all of you here to ask, does anyone know of any warp jump points that can bring us to the vicinity of Kasent?"

The ship captains looked to each other speechlessly. They felt that Sir Jay was being naive in this matter. If there was such a warp jump point, people would have noticed it and used it frequently.

Gray Valley was shaped like a hourglass, and Kasent was at the waist of this hourglass. Besides, there was simply no warp jump point nearby that could bring them past Planet Kasent.

This was common knowledge. Surely Sir Jay would know about it?

Just then, one of the captains raised his hand hesitantly, "Sir Jay, I - I know of a place, maybe - maybe we can ..."

The captain was a large man, about 50 years of age. There was a noticeable scar at the corner of his right eye. His eyes twinkled like he was hoping to share something.

"Alright, think about this problem for now, let me know if you have a solution. You may return to your stations. Remember, we're running out of time. Hmm, I will also not have rumors spreading around." Ye Chong pointed to the captain who raised his hand and said, "You, stay!"

All the other captains took their leave. There was now only Ye

Chong, Xi Qing, Shu and the captain who raised his hand.

"Alright, you can speak now," Ye Chong said.

The captain looked relieved. "Sir Jay, I know of a place. It's a warp jump point. From there, we can reach the vicinity of Planet Spectre."

"Where is it?" The rest of the people in the room were encouraged by the news.

The captain was hesitant, he shared his information, "It's in the Calamitous Asteroid Belt."

Xi Qing and Shu both looked taken aback. They looked at the captain with wary eyes. If he tried anything funny, they will react immediately! The Calamitous Asteroid Belt, he said. This place was named so because of the numerous dangerous that laid within. Unpredictable asteroid whirlpools found inside could destroy even the strongest starship ever built. The chances of them surviving the Calamitous Asteroid Belt was no higher than when fighting against the red-tailed beasts head on.

This captain must be planning something behind their backs!

Was he trying to destroy the entire fleet? Xi Qing's eyes burned with rage, while Shu's eyes turned cold.

"The Calamitous Asteroid Belt? Where do we enter, what is the general location of the jump point? And how did you know about it?" To the duo's surprise, Sir Jay did not seemed angered, but was instead asking curiously.

With that, the captain continued without delay, "If we proceed at 33 degrees to the radius vector, it will take about 15 days for us to reach the Calamitous Asteroid Belt. Once we're in, it will be about another three days before we get to the warp jump point. I remember it's location clearly, at (79, 23, -661, Y). As for how I found out about it ..."

He smiled wryly, "Truth is, I was a space pirate."

Ye Chong still looked calm when Xi Qing and Shu expressed their surprise.

"Haha, this was more than 20 years ago. Back then, we were pursued by one of the Research Consortium's tracking squads. We nearly lost everything, with 16 of us still alive. However, the tracking squad did not stop pursuing us. We were desperate enough to enter the Calamitous Asteroid Belt. It was then that we discovered the warp jump point. We didn't know where it led to back then. However, anywhere was better than the Calamitous Asteroid Belt. Haha, we were also growing desperate. Food and water were running out, and our energy's almost exhausted. It was a gamble we had to take. In the end, we won."

The man seemed to age further as he recounted his memories with a bit of nostalgia and self-mockery.

Shang suddenly spoke up, "Isn't it said that no one could ever leave Spectre? How did you escape?"

The captain shook his head. 'We didn't approach the planet, but simply fly along the edges of the asteroid belt. No pirate dared to go near Spectre, it's an unwritten rule."

The Calamitous Asteroid Belt ...

Ye Chong tapped his finger lightly on the desk, deep in thought.

Chapter 499: Change VI

Ye Chong was now between a rock and a hard place. The warp jump point offered by the former space pirate was the only escape route he had, but if they really entered the Calamitous Asteroid Belt, just how much of the fleet would survive the journey?

They would probably suffer heavily.

Nevertheless, Ye Chong was not an indecisive person. Entering the Calamitous Asteroid Belt offered a chance to survive, but not entering the Calamitous Asteroid Belt would lead to certain death. The choice was obvious.

To the Calamitous Asteroid Belt!

Once word got around the fleet, it ignited an uproar. Soon, Haskel received requests from a few starships to leave the fleet. Ye Chong let them leave without delay.

Once these ships left, many others followed. What were the implications of entering the Calamitous Asteroid Belt? This was a place of death, a place with dangers that no human could defend against. Entering the Calamitous Asteroid Belt was suicidal. Besides, the strategy of the red-tailed beasts was only a guess. Sir Jay might be powerful, but he could still make mistakes. His prediction was not supported by any strong proof.

Their assessment of the situation was completely opposite to Ye Chong's. Entering the Calamitous Asteroid Belt would lead to certain death, but the intention of the red-tailed beasts was still suspect. The choice was obvious in this way.

Ye Chong did not stop any of them from leaving. Their departure would reduce the overall strength of the fleet, but to him, that was actually preferable. These doubtful people would otherwise be a ticking time bomb to the fleet. They might behave unpredictably should they encounter any dangers ahead.

He would rather let them leave than have this risk in the fleet.

For the people on those departing ships who wished to stay, Ye Chong accepted them all. Many of them were the mech pilots and technical staff who worked under him. They had trained under Ye Chong's rule, and thus were more loyal than others. The mech pilots who were trained by Ye Chong himself in particular had all stayed behind.

As soldiers of the frontlines, they realize that without Sir Jay, they would be powerless against the red-tailed beasts. It was because of Sir Jay that they were no longer mediocre mech pilots. Now, they could hold their own against the red-tailed beasts. Leaving Sir Jay would spell their deaths. Besides, with Sir Jay in the fleet, they would face any danger ahead together.

If that was the case, what else was there to be afraid of?

The fleet's army shrunk dramatically. There were now only 500 ships left, carrying about 150 thousand people. To Ye Chong's surprise, the remains of the fleet were stronger than before. Not only did they manage to retain all combatants, the ratio of technical staff was also higher. In terms of resources, they lost little else but the energy cells allocated to the departing starships.

All in all, the situation was still under his control.

Ye Chong reorganized the fleet immediately, consolidating the fleet hierarchy. The fleet had seemed too large and unwieldy before this. Back then, with a smaller proportion of combatants, he needed to allocate more of them for defensive measures.

Now, however, things were much better.

Since the decision was made, let's do this! Ye Chong gave the order for the fleet to advance towards the Calamitous Asteroid Belt.

It would be another 15 days before they reach the Calamitous Asteroid Belt.

In these 15 days, Ye Chong did not plan to be idle. His mech pilots trained as usual, but the maintenance crew were kept busy in their every waking hour.

All the starships received orders to fortify the hulls. This must be achieved in these 15 days. Ye Chong had been in and out of the Calamitous Asteroid Belt a few times. With Mu and Shang's aid, and a bit of luck, he had managed to do so unscathed so far. Hence, he understood the place much better than others.

The Calamitous Asteroid Belt's biggest danger was its asteroid whirlpools. The large and small rocks in the whirlpool could reduce anything to dust. However, if that captain was right, it would take them only three days to reach the warp jump point. The chances of them encountering an asteroid whirlpool in that time was low.

From Ye Chong's experience, the asteroid whirlpools were usually in the deeper parts of the Calamitous Asteroid Belt. They rarely occurred near the boundaries. Therefore, they should prioritize in protecting the hulls of their ships from being damaged by the floating rocks in the Calamitous Asteroid Belt.

Most of the ships were civilian type, much weaker in structure compared to their warships. It was necessary and urgent for them to strengthen these ships at their vulnerable spots to make them tougher.

The 500 starships must be fortified in 15 days. The order sounded like an impossible task. There were quite a number of maintenance crew members in the fleet, but strengthening 500 starships in 15 days was still too much.

Hence, the job demanded practically all hands on board. Only the mech pilots were spared for their training.

Yang Ming's eyes were bloodshot, but still he gritted his teeth

and held on. The others around him all shared his present state of having barely any sleep for days.

His hands were sluggish. Days of work had pushed him to a state of extreme fatigue. His lips were cracked, his eyes sunken. His mind was a blank as he repeated the same old tasks.

He needed to sleep! He felt that if he closed his eyes for one second, he would just fall asleep instantly.

However, he could not sleep, not when time was pressed. Every second he squeezed out to work might just save another man's life.

Yang Ming and his family had decided to stay behind with Sir Jay while the other starships left. He and his family believed that Sir Jay was the only one who would lead them to triumph.

Yang Ming's foundation was excellent, and his constant work and practice recently had finally earned him the status of a fully certified maintenance crew member. His rise in status earned more respect from the people around him, and even more responsibilities.

Even now, Yang Ming trusted Sir Jay. The man was not too much older than Yang Ming, but he idolized their leader. Yang Ming was hardly the only young person in the fleet who idolized Ye Chong. Most of the people who chose to leave had been older.

The strong and wise Sir Jay had saved from the brink of death, leading them himself in their large scale victory. If not for Sir Jay, they would have perished in the hands of the red-tailed beasts. What reason was there not to follow him?

When the order came, Yang Ming immediately buried himself in work. Unlike other people who complained about not having enough time, he knew how desperate their situation really was. He also knew that his comrades shared the sentiment, only complaining out of frustration.

"Lil' Yang, get some rest," a hoarse voice came from behind him,

sounding concerned. It was Father Bach!

Father Bach watched the bookish young man with an aching heart. To him, Yang Ming was a good role model for all the young people in the fleet. He was young, smart and eager to learn. While he looked soft, he was strong in character. Besides, Yang Ming looked good enough to gain admiration from a good many young ladies in the fleet.

Yang Ming was pleasantly surprised. "Father Bach." Yang Ming felt self conscious, and a little uncertain. Father Bach had a strong reputation amongst the technical staff in the fleet. With him leading the logistics and maintenance departments, there was nothing they needed to worry about. This hearty man, the fair and skillful Father Bach, enjoyed profound respect from Yang Ming.

Father Bach patted Yang Ming on the shoulder with his thick and calloused hands, complimenting him, "Good work. Now leave it to me."

Yang Ming nodded, hoping to reply back with something, but his parched throat refused to comply. He quickly went to a corner to drink some water.

Father Bach began to concentrate on his work.

Yang Ming's gaze landed on Father Bach's broad shoulders. He felt relieved, and sat in the corner to rest. Sleep enveloped almost the instant he closed his eyes.

A young woman walking past saw Yang Ming curled up asleep in the corner and felt an ache in her heart. She trotted off to fetch a blanket and covered him with it. Later, she returned to put some food and water beside him.

500 starships was a large figure for a fleet of starships. To fortify them all was likewise a formidable task.

This was a war against time.

If they could not complete the job in time, the civilian ships

without fortified hulls would not be able to withstand the impact from the rocks in the Calamitous Asteroid Belt. Once a starship exploded, the rocks in the vicinity would be shot about even more violently. It would be catastrophic for the fleet.

Nonetheless, they could not afford to spend more time before entering the Calamitous Asteroid Belt. The red-tailed beasts were in tight pursuit behind them. If they caught on to the fleet, it would be very messy business. If the red-tailed beasts caught on to the fleet in the Calamitous Asteroid Belt, they would never survive the trip.

The floating rocks were everywhere in the Calamitous Asteroid Belt, advantageous for the red-tailed beasts but dangerous for mechs. This unfair battleground would not yield a desirable outcome.

Chapter 500: Changes VII

Yang Ming woke up with a grumbling stomach. He was positively famished. Then he noticed the food and water left beside him. He paused in surprise before devouring them all.

He also noticed the blanket on him after that. His heart warmed at the gesture, and he tried to guess who had done it for him. In the end, he could not reach a satisfying conclusion, so he left it at that.

Father Bach was no longer there. The fortifying work for this starship was done.

Finishing his food gave new energy to Yang Ming. He activated his comms and reported to his superior, "Id W47236 maintenance staff Yang Ming is done resting. Seastar maintenance is done. I'm now on Seastar, awaiting further instructions."

His superior responded swiftly, "W47236, on top of the points for your working attitude and results, we will be awarding an extra five points as incentive. Now, please assist with starship Virienko. The transport vessel is already in position for you at Passage 5. Godspeed."

Yang Ming saluted, "Thank you. I'll head for Virienko immediately." Points were important in the fleet for various purposes such as promotions and benefits. Each job that Yang Ming took would be rewarded with points. If a job was done with extra diligence, more points would be awarded. Everyone working in the fleet would obtain points. Details of this point system could be found in the Points Manual introduced by Sir Jay.

The Points Manual was painstakingly detailed. Each job would be associated with a certain number of points. If a staff died in battle or due to their work, their points would be converted to monetary or other relevant forms of compensation for their heirs as per their will.

However, most staff members did not treat the point system seriously. Usage of the fleet's resources were monitored strictly. They were not paid with money for their work, and even if they were, there was nothing to spend it on. Hence, the workers did not mind how many points they earned, Yang Ming included. He now had 820 points, the highest amongst his peers.

Of course, none of them realized how this neglected point system would later benefit them tremendously.

Yang Ming entered Passage 5 and found the vessel waiting for him.

After verifying his ID, the vessel brought Yang Ming to Virienko. The vessel was a very small flying ship with a maximum capacity of 10 crew members. It was about five meters long, like a space car, used mainly for transportation between ships in the fleet.

Soon, they reached Virienko.

It looked like he was the only maintenance staff on Virienko. There was no sign of any fortification work on the ship yet.

He began to inspect the ship's main structure to determine which places to fortify.

Suddenly, he heard the loud whirring of a laser welder. Was there another maintenance staff around? He quickly traced the source of the sound. Communication between maintenance staff would help speed up progress and reduce the chances of making mistakes.

He made a turn and, as expected, saw a maintenance staff member crouched on the floor, hard at work.

Since the man had his back to him, he could not make out the staff's face. However, this particular staff was welding with good precision, and Yang Ming admired that.

He approached the man and greeted him, "Hey, bro, where you at now?"

The man turned over, "I've only just begun."

When he took in the man's face, Yang Ming froze on the spot like he was hit by lightning. It was a good 30 seconds before he responded with disbelief, "Sir - Sir Jay!"

Ye Chong's expression was inert. He nodded and said plainly, "Right, let's get to work."

"Yes sir." Yang Ming quickly took out his gear.

It had been a while since Ye Chong had to do maintenance work himself. It was necessary now. Time was precious, and every bit of manpower counted. Ye Chong was experienced in maintenance work. After all, he had done all kinds of maintenance work looking back. Fortification work, like this one now, did not require any specialized technical expertise. Compared to the upgrades he did on Coxcomb before, this was a walk in the park.

Yang Ming stole a glance at Sir Jay. He was surprised to see their leader knowing how to weld, and doing it even better than him. The truth was, he was simply shocked. To most people in the fleet, Sir Jay commanded respect as their superior. This same man was now right before him, sitting on an alloy bench casually, focused on his work, just like any other maintenance staff member.

Soon, Yang Ming gathered himself and began to concentrate on his work.

For two hours, the two of them did not exchange a word. They worked fast and made smooth progress.

Yang Ming put down his laser welding gun and massaged his arms. Using the laser welding gun was mentally straining. The human arm was also not as durable as a mechanical arm. A maintenance staff member would usually have to rest awhile after long hours of work. This was to rest both the mind and body.

He looked to Sir Jay and found the man putting down his laser welding gun as well, though he had covered a larger area than

Yang Ming by now.

"Sir Jay, do you think that we'll survive this?" Yang Ming asked abruptly. It was a foolish question, he realized.

Ye Chong lifted his head to look at Yang Ming. His reply was steady, "Of course."

Silence descended on the two once again.

For 15 days, the entire fleet worked tirelessly on this massive fortification operation.

In these 15 days, a rumor began to spread in Gray Valley, one that was directly related to Ye Chong.

The people who chose to leave the fleet were many. Some formed their own fleets, but most decided to go at it alone.

Rumors of Sir Jay spreaded wherever they went. When they were in the fleet, external communications were controlled by Shang. Now that they had left, their comms returned to normal.

Since too many people were spreading the tale, multiple versions of it were born. There were also pretenders who came up with their own stories, further muddying the waters. This resulted in all kinds of colorful rumors about Sir Jay.

At the same time, another topic was gaining traction in Gray Valley, and that was Sir Jay's assessment of their situation. Of the captains who left the fleet, some had attended the meeting that Sir Jay called for. It was through them that Ye Chong's assessment of Gray Valley's situation was leaked to every corner of Gray Valley.

Ye Chong's assessment was greeted in all kinds of fashion. Some agreed with him, some did not, and some stayed on the fence. However, in the next few days, more and more starships were seen flying past the vicinity of planet Kasent.

Arwa heard of it as well, but his sources were more dependable. Of all the new ships that he recruited to his own new fleet was one

led by a captain he had known personally. This captain had attended Ye Chong's extraordinary meeting.

The captain told him everything as Arwa further probed, of Sir Jay's assessment of the situation and the exact location of the warp jump point in the Calamitous Asteroid Belt.

Arwa asked for every single detail. This Sir Jay had came out of nowhere, and Arwa was interested in that. No one had won so victoriously against the red-tailed beast before Sir Jay's battle. This was not a feat that can be achieved with just good luck. As the captain divulged more, Arwa felt even more awed. This Sir Jay sounded more powerful than the rumors suggested. He had organized his fleet in an interesting manner, and devised original but effective strategies to fight against the red-tailed beasts. This mysterious Sir Jay was strong. He seemed to be invincible, a man with a cold and calm mind who never made mistakes.

What a terrifying person!

He exchanged a look with Xiao Wan, both of them recognizing the fear in the other person's eyes. Besides, they noticed something curious about Sir Jay - he did not seem to be afraid of the red-tailed beasts. In fact, history had proven that he could win against those ugly monsters. Newbies who had only been trained for a few months by the man himself could already hold against the red-tailed beasts. This was enough to embarrass people with higher authority, including Arwa himself.

Arwa's fleet still could not hold itself against red-tailed beast armies that were slightly larger than a small group. Sir Jay had defeated these red-tailed beasts, strong and fast creatures that were also vicious and cunning. Arwa knew that it was not hard to find a mech pilot who could fight against a red-tailed beast one-on-one. There were probably mech pilots who could fight and win against a few red-tailed beasts.

However, in the grand scale of things, strength from a single

person was insignificant. No one could single-handedly turn the tables of a full blown war. This was why conventional armies were crushed by the red-tailed beast armies.

Arwa had always believed that only strong mech pilots could form an army that could win against an equal number of red-tailed beasts. This Sir Jay, however, had challenged his very understanding of the war. He did not know when he first heard the rumors that this legendary fleet's army was made up of young people who had only been training for a few months. The information he got from this old captain made him realize it, and he had thought he had heard wrong the first time.

The fleet's achievement was all connected to their commander, Jay. The man had built the fleet from scratch, its every inch a shadow of the man himself. His war strategies were also unique, and Arwa was thoroughly impressed by them. Arwa had always been called a genius tactician, but now he realized that someone was way ahead of him.

Arwa felt excitement, admiration, respect, and a little fearful towards this mysterious Sir Jay. It was a little difficult to deal with all these emotions.

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